

# **From Rookie to Rocky? On Modernity, Identity and White-Collar Boxing**

*Edward John Wright, BA (Hons), MSc, MA*

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**September, 2017**

## **Abstract**

This thesis is the first sociological examination of white-collar boxing in the UK; a form of the sport particular to late modernity. Given this, the first research question asked is: what is white-collar boxing in this context? Further research questions pertain to social divisions and identity. White-collar boxing originally takes its name from the high social class of its practitioners in the USA, something which is not found in this study. White-collar boxing in and through this research is identified as a practice with a highly misleading title, given that those involved are not primarily from white-collar backgrounds. Rather than signifying the social class of practitioner, white-collar boxing is understood to pertain to a form of the sport in which complete beginners participate in an eight-week boxing course, in order to compete in a publicly-held, full-contact boxing match in a glamorous location in front of a large crowd. It is, thus, a condensed reproduction of the long-term career of the professional boxer, commodified for consumption by others. These courses are understood by those involved to be free in monetary terms, and undertaken to raise money for charity. As is evidenced in this research, neither is straightforwardly the case, and white-collar boxing can, instead, be understood as a philanthrocapitalist arrangement. The study involves ethnographic observation and interviews at a boxing club in the Midlands, as well as public weigh-ins and fight nights, to explore the complex interrelationships amongst class, gender and ethnicity to reveal the negotiation of identity in late modernity.

## **Acknowledgements**

Melanie Jordan and John Holmwood are the best supervisors one could hope for. Both Mel and John were incredibly supportive, understanding and insightful, and recurrently went far beyond the call of their supervisory duties. I cannot thank them enough.

Amal Treacher Kabesh and Andrew Yip, who successively held the position of director of doctoral studies in the school of Sociology and Social Policy, should be thanked for their great work in terms of overseeing and supporting the PhD community.

Alison Haigh was the very best PGR administrator. It is a great loss to the University that she has retired.

The sociology PhD community deserve thanks for their friendship and collegial support. Macarena Orchard deserves a special mention here, especially for the many theoretically-rich chats we have had (Maca provided the theoretical richness).

I am grateful to the ESRC for funding this research.

A massive thanks to those who participated in this study. White-collar boxing courses are highly demanding, least of all with a researcher asking for time and attention. I am very grateful that you allowed me to conduct this research.

Thanks to Liz Warwick, for amongst other things, supplying me with a PhD survival kit in the form of a hamper filled with delicious snacks.

Judith, Alan and Bill Wright have been highly supportive throughout this thesis, and indeed throughout my life. RIP Tinker Wright, to whom this thesis is dedicated.

Finally, Lisa Warwick, my wonderful partner, deserves more thanks than can be expressed in words. Lisa gave me the strength to finish this thesis, all whilst doing her own PhD and, following this, working in an incredibly tough research environment. Yo Lisa! We did it!

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## **1. Introduction**

*It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this*

*– things are not what they seem.*

(Berger, 1963: 34)

### **1.1 The Treachery of Images**

It is well-rehearsed that sociology should be concerned with making the familiar strange (Mills, 2000; Bauman and May, 2001). This thesis is however charged with making the strange familiar, in order to then make it strange again. There is little existing scholarship on white-collar boxing, compared to its better-established counterparts, particularly amateur and professional boxing. Moreover, the minimal scholarship that does exist on white-collar boxing (Trimbur, 2013) does not reflect the same kind of white-collar boxing studied in this research. Far from it, as this thesis will establish, they are effectively different practices that share a name. There is therefore little extant literature through which the empirical content of this thesis can be contextualised.

As this thesis will discuss, white-collar boxing in this context aims to reproduce as a commodity for consumption the experience of being a professional boxer in idealised terms. The familiarising discussion, therefore, will often occur via discussion of professional boxing. Chapters 7-9, in particular, require the theorisation of professional boxing for this purpose. For instance, to facilitate Chapter 8, which theorises upon white-collar boxing weigh-ins, it is first necessary to sketch how professional boxing weigh-ins are conducted, for it is this which white-collar weigh-ins seek to reproduce.

The empirical grounding of this thesis is in a boxing context, but ultimately this thesis has not been undertaken to only produce knowledge about boxing. It has done so, though only in relation to one unorthodox form of boxing: white-collar boxing. Crucially, in this form of the sport things are not what they seem. Chapter 8, for instance, as suggested above, finds its empirical context in an activity that looks like a boxing weigh-in. On closer inspection, however, it lacks the purpose of ascertaining the weights of

white-collar boxers. Rather, it exists as a commodified reproduction of a boxing weigh-in, consumed by white-collar boxers seeking the experience of being a pro. In straightforward terms, whilst it looks like a weigh-in, it is not a weigh-in. For this reason, the wish to know about weigh-ins as they occur throughout the vast majority of boxing cannot be fulfilled, at least directly, by this thesis. In other words, this is not a thesis about boxing, in as much as Magritte's painting of a pipe – *The Treachery of Images* – is not a pipe. Whilst from the 'commonsense vantage' (Harkness in Foucault, 1983: 5) it clearly is a pipe, you cannot use it to smoke tobacco.

## **1.2 Motivations for this Study**

This project did not occur from nowhere, and the route I took to arrive here deserves some attention to better understand its final form. Initially, my intention was not to research boxing. As an undergraduate studying sociology and social policy, I had developed an interest in social theory, particularly in Foucault and how his work might be applicable to contemporary surveillance practices. My undergraduate dissertation was a Foucauldian analysis of a scheme wherein offenders are released from prison early, on the condition that they wear an electronic tag to monitor their location (otherwise known as Electronic Monitoring, or EM). My master's dissertation examined whether resistance was sufficiently accounted for in Foucault's account of power, and what this might mean for criminologists working in a Foucauldian mode. I argued that resistance was insufficiently conceptualised by Foucault, and that Bourdieu's scholarship retained some similarity to Foucault's account but is better on the resistance/agency front, albeit that he had not been paid much attention by criminologists, and I outlined a plan for a Bourdieusian criminology. Post-masters, I set about planning a PhD proposal. Initially, I planned to facilitate 12 rounds of French post-structuralist action – *Foucault versus Bourdieu: who has the best resistance?* – though I soon learned that the chance for doing such research was slim-to-none. I had however retained an interest in EM, and planned an empirical project examining EM which sought to situate the lived experience of tagging within a wider penal and social landscape. This proposal was accepted by the School of Law at The University of Nottingham, and I was awarded ESRC funding to conduct this research, on a 1+3 scholarship.

Enter 'the dragoman' (Blackshaw, 2005) – Zygmunt Bauman – to this story, who, with David Lyon had, around the time of the commencement of this project, published *Liquid Surveillance* (Bauman and Lyon, 2013). EM is a punishment reliant on a surveillance technology, it individuates, and is not reliant on one of the hallmark institutions of modernity, prison, whilst, in some cases, achieving similar effects. Questions were raised that had begun to form the theoretical backbone of the thesis. These were something like: What might EM mean for the construction of identity in Bauman's terms? Could EM be understood as liquid punishment?

A coalescing of political events approximately a year into this doctorate however prevented any chance of its completion. The then Ministry of Justice Secretary of State Chris Grayling MP announced and implemented *Transforming Rehabilitation*, overhauling the probation service, exactly at the point at which I needed access. I contacted every probation trust in England and Wales, to no avail. Alongside this, the private providers of EM services in England and Wales were subject to a Serious Fraud Office investigation for erroneously charging the Ministry of Justice for their tagging services. The public contracts for the provision of EM, once-expected to be renewed for Serco and G4S, were put out for tender, and numerous other companies bid for them. These were start-up companies, and telecommunication companies who had previously not provided criminal justice services. The tendering process was therefore disorderly, with no end in sight. Any chance of access was totally scuppered. Nellis – a leading authority on EM – recently noted that the situation was 'astonishing in its doctrinaire incompetence' (Nellis, 2017: 2). Because of this 'utter fiasco' (Nellis, 2017: 2), I was left without a project concerned with sociologically analysing punishment, and being a sociologist, I had no business remaining in a school of law.

There is a concurrent narrative that needs to be addressed alongside the above, however, to understand my entry to the boxing club, and ultimately the direction of this research. Whilst writing my master's dissertation on Foucault, Bourdieu, power and resistance, I was also attending a community rehabilitation programme. I gave up drinking (though not instantly) on receipt of the news that I had been awarded ESRC funding. Amongst other things, the rehabilitation programme provided worksheets on which we would write our thoughts and feelings on alcohol in various capacities. I still have these worksheets. Next to a question about with what we might replace

our habit, the only answer I wrote was: 'boxing?' This thesis does not concern or discuss rehabilitation, though this narration of boxing was partly what drew me towards the sport, and seems to have worked in my case. I enrolled at a boxing club, spent a year there, training recreationally, and eventually signed up to fight. It was a white-collar fight against an amateur boxer, taking extra fights on the sly. This is an atypical arrangement, and it perhaps here serves as an early sounding of a recurrent theme for this thesis, that in white-collar boxing things are not what they seem.

It is with a 'hunch' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:158) that many ethnographies begin to form, and indeed the moment I heard the phrase white-collar boxing I developed a feeling that this practice is sociologically significant. Class identity for some (e.g. Bauman, 2000) is supposed to have waned under conditions of post-industrialism, though in white-collar boxing there is a sport, emergent in and particular to this time that contains a class signifier in its title. This situation provided the entry point of analysis for this thesis. As this thesis suggests, particularly from Chapter 5 onwards, the language employed to describe this form of the sport paints a treacherous image. Having engaged with both Bauman and Wacquant in terms of developing a theory of identity relating to EM, and already poised to explore the formation of identity in late modernity, conducting research on white-collar boxing was, for me at least, an obvious choice.

When I describe to people this transition from researching EM to white-collar boxing, I am met with all kinds of responses. The impression I most often get, however, is that whoever I am telling assumes I must take academia light-heartedly to take such a leap. I never quite have had the gall to reply in these terms, though here my response is that Michel Foucault was not concerned as much with prisons (Foucault, 1991), clinics (Foucault, 1973) and sexuality (Foucault, 1978) as he was with the analysis of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980b), excavating the discursive foundations upon which our present lie, which he theorised *through* these institutions. Similar could be said about Erving Goffman, Hebridean Islands (Goffman, 1959/1990), Asylums (Goffman, 1961), and the art of the con (Goffman, 1952). Emphatically, I am not saying that what follows is anywhere near equivalent in magnitude to that of Foucault or Goffman. Nor is the implication that this thesis works within either a Foucauldian or Goffmanian mode. What I am saying is this: of course, EM and white-collar boxing are immediately disparate practices, but both theses were about identity in late

modernity and the socially constructed conditions that co-ordinate action, the empirical circumstance being of secondary importance. This is not to say that the knowledge produced in my ill-fated research on EM would in any way necessarily have mirrored that in this thesis, but understood in this way, what might seem like a leap becomes more of a hop.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Questions**

There is only one extant ethnographic account of white-collar boxing, based in the city of New York (NYC) context (Trimbur, 2013). This thesis therefore aims to establish what white-collar boxing is, as it exists in the UK. Boxing as a practice has been historically understood as a site formed of social divisions (particularly class, gender, and race) and through which identities are formed in relation to these social divisions. White-collar boxing is a form of the sport particular to late modernity, an era in which practice is said to have become individualised, and in which durable identities are no longer formed in relation to the aforementioned divisions. This thesis, therefore, aims to examine if and how social divisions inform practice in white-collar boxing, and what this means in terms of identity construction. The research questions this thesis addresses are as follows:

1. What is white-collar boxing?
2. How do social divisions co-ordinate practice in white-collar boxing?
3. What can white-collar boxing contribute to the understanding of the construction of identity in late modernity?

### **1.4 Thesis Outline**

**Chapter 2** should be understood as the first of two literature review chapters in this thesis. The chapter discusses the various forms the sport has taken: professional, amateur, unlicensed, recreational, and white-collar. Via this discussion, social class is located in various ways as a co-ordinating social force of boxing practices, from inception of codification of the sport to present-day. It identifies white-collar boxing as a distinctly late-modern practice, emergent in NYC in the 1980s, which, overall uncharacteristically for boxing, is undertaken by a wealthy elite. It also identifies, however, that empirical investigation, and accordingly, sociological knowledge of white-

collar boxing in the domestic context is non-existent. Things not always being what they seem in social life, white-collar boxing here does not necessarily mirror that of NYC. Through this discussion the first question this thesis addresses is identified: *what is white-collar boxing?*

**Chapter 3**, the second literature review chapter, is more immediately concerned with assessing sociological literature relevant to boxing more generally. Boxing has widely been understood as important in terms of identity, particularly in terms of class, race and gender. Discussion is held in these terms. Professional boxing is theorised as a career through which an identity can be built through long term practice, whereas white-collar boxing seems to exhibit some features of Bauman's conception of identity: a short-term consumption offering instant identity reformulation. Equally, whereas for Bauman identity is an individualised project, previous white-collar boxing scholarship indicates that identity consumption is a class-based practice. Beyond NYC, the classed arrangement the term white-collar seems to imply, however, may be misleading, meaning that all theorisation is provisional. In other words, through the discussion held in this chapter, the following research questions are identified: *How do social divisions co-ordinate practice in white-collar boxing?* and *What can white-collar boxing contribute to the understanding of the construction of identity in late modernity?*

**Chapter 4** elaborates the research design and methodology this research adopts to answer the research questions constructed through the literature review. The social constructionist ontological and interpretivist epistemological foundations of this research are debated, and following this, method (participant observation and life history interview) and analysis (thematic) are outlined. Ethics are also discussed: emphasis is paid to the procedural ethics process to which this research was subjected prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The university insurance brokers determined the appropriate means for knowledge production, and ultimately, a non-participatory ethnography was demanded, as a means of negating the physical harm participatory research in white-collar boxing might entail.

**Chapter 5** welcomes the reader to the field in thick, descriptive terms. The social categories of Shadcote Boxing Club are described, as is the white-collar boxing process. White-collar boxing is identified as operating according to a strict, eight-week timetable. White-collar boxers are complete novices, and tend to only undertake one white-collar boxing programme, through which they are offered transit from 'rookie to Rocky'. For this reason

– that white-collar boxing is a short-term, commodified touristic experience of what has previously been a long-term career – it is argued that white-collar boxing is a quintessentially late-modern practice. It is identified that there is a heavy emphasis on white-collar boxing being monetarily free and for charity. The political economy of white-collar boxing is discussed. Things are not what they seem: white-collar boxing is neither free, nor straightforwardly for charity. White-collar boxing is located as a philanthrocapitalist project, wherein participants are surreptitiously commodified.

**Chapter 6** discusses white-collar boxing in terms of the social class of its practitioners, given that white-collar boxing, in its inception was a class-based practice, and that the term white-collar has class connotations. Counter to intuition, white-collar boxers are not necessarily white-collar workers, nor can white-collar boxers be understood to occupy similar positions in social space to previous reports of white-collar boxers in terms of social class. This is not to say, however, that all white-collar boxers are working-class. Rather, white-collar boxers occupy various class positions. This finding seems to support the late-modernist notion that under advanced capitalism the relationship examined by Bourdieu, that class informs consumption, has been severed. However, the qualitative experience of consumption differs according to social class.

**Chapter 7** discusses the sparring (full-contact boxing training) that white-collar boxers undertake in preparation for fight night. Participants enter the gym with habituses formed of a rigid gender order beyond the boxing club: men tend to enter the gym fearful of being hit in the face, whereas women tend to enter the gym fearful of hitting others in the face. This is perceived by participants to be natural, though through social practice these dispositions are subject to change. This suggests that, far from being an enclave of a solid modern era, the boxing club can be situated within a social reality which is not as liquid as is proclaimed to be. Male Eastern European migrants enter the gym eager to spar, and their approach to sparring is very physical. These dispositions are locatable, as with all participants, as being socially produced. However, this is misrecognised and perceived as an intrinsic element of their being, nationality becomes racialised. Nationality, race, class and gender therefore intersect causing violent eruptions in the gym.

**Chapter 8** discusses the weigh-ins that white-collar boxers undertake prior to fight night. Weight is an insignificant criterion for match-making and competition in white-collar boxing. That is, weigh-ins exist as a practice bereft of the meaning the term weigh-in seems to imply. Why white-collar boxing weigh-ins exist is therefore examined. The weigh-in is characterised as a ritual, through which training is rendered the past and fight night the present. In part, this is achieved through revealing to white-collar boxers who they will be fighting on fight night. This exercise mirrors the public weigh-ins undertaken by professional boxers fighting for titles, and in this way white-collar boxers can consume the idealised experience of being a professional boxer.

**Chapter 9** discusses the publicly-held fight nights white-collar boxers participate in at the end of the eight-week course. Fight night is an idealised reproduction of a professional boxing shows: there is a large, smartly-dressed crowd in attendance, they are held in glamorous locations, and are characterised by excess. As does this thesis overall discuss the white-collar boxing process in this way, fight night is discussed chronologically. By following white-collar boxers through fight night – backstage, warming-up, entering the ring, fighting, and then exiting the ring – it is argued that white-collar boxers do not transit 'from rookie to Rocky'. Fight night is constructed as a subjunctive reality, wherein white-collar boxers can consume the experience of being a professional boxer, through performance 'as if it truly were the case' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 20: original emphasis). Though it is a late-modern consumption experience, identity *per se* is not being constructed through consumption.



## 2. What is Boxing?

*White Collar Boxing? Sure, you know about that, a bunch of posh boys, bankers probably, slogging it out in front of their middle management peers at an anonymous black tie gala somewhere in the Square Mile. While, yes, that is an accurate picture of some evening's entertainment, it's increasingly becoming the exception rather than the rule (White Collar Boxing London, 2016).*

### 2.1 Introduction

The term boxing 'derives from the box shape of the closed hand, or fist, which in Latin is *pugnus* (hence the alternative terms *pugilism* and *fisticuffs*)' (Garcia and Spencer, 2013: *xiii*, original emphasis). Fundamentally, it entails two competitors fighting one another. Fights are won by punching one's opponent more than they punch you, or by punching one's opponent inflicting damage to the extent that they cannot continue (Woodward, 2014). Boxing, understood at this reductive level is arguably the oldest of all sports (Sugden, 1996); such practices date to at least 3000 BC (Boddy, 2008). Across time and space, however, boxing practices vary. As Woodward (2014: 55) notes '[b]oxing takes many different forms'. This chapter maps out these practices under the following headings: *professional boxing*, *amateur boxing*, *unlicensed boxing*, *recreational boxing*, and *white-collar boxing*. These are presented with historical context, though, as Sugden (1996: 9) states in relation to his text *Boxing and Society*, 'this is not a history book'. This mapping is purposefully instrumental and provides an undoubtedly incomplete overview of boxing practices and their histories. It is presented to contextualise the genesis of white-collar boxing in the twilight of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in post-industrial New York City, and to elucidate what white-collar boxing is in relation to other forms of the sport. Rudimentary connections to theory are made as necessary, though the extant sociology of boxing is addressed in detail in Chapter 3.

In this respect, the following should be noted: whilst women participate in all the forms of boxing discussed below, and women have boxed at every point in the history of the sport in some form (Smith, 2014), the sport is

dominated by men (Woodward, 2007). It is beyond the remit of this chapter to discuss in depth the complex and varied gendered dynamics of boxing practices (Channon and Matthews, 2015). This will be addressed in following chapters. Similarly, boxing has a racialized history (Carrington, 2010) and, at present, can be understood as a domain in which race orders practice (Trimbur, 2011a), though this is largely unaddressed in this chapter. Social class is necessarily discussed in the chapter. White-collar is a signifier of social class (Mills, 1951/2002) deliberately employed to differentiate its practitioners from amateur and professional boxers (Trimbur, 2013), who in most cases are working class (Trimbur, 2013; Woodward, 2014). The classed dynamics and experiences of boxing however, as with the gendered and racialized dynamics and experiences entailed within the sport, will be addressed in far greater detail in the following chapter.

## **2.2 Professional Boxing**

Professional boxing is a form of the sport of boxing for which participants are paid to compete (Oates, 2006). The British Boxing Board of Control (BBBofC) is the governing body for domestic professional boxing. Professional boxing is however a globalized sport (Woodward, 2014), and overseen by various official bodies, for instance: World Boxing Association (WBA), World Boxing Organisation (WBO), World Boxing Council (WBC) and International Boxing Federation (IBF). Professional boxing is 'a massively profitable business' (Woodward, 2014: 15), via pay-per-view television, sponsorship of events and individual athletes, ticket sales to events and gambling (Woodward, 2014). The global epicentre for professional boxing is arguably Las Vegas, where venues such as Caesar's Palace regularly hold world title fights of the bodies listed above (Woodward, 2007). The dramatic performance entailed in such boxing events is discussed further in Chapter 9. Those boxing on the world stage are amongst the highest paid athletes in the world, but are few and far between (Sugden, 1996). Many professional boxers often undertake work in addition to employment-as-pugilist (BBBofC, 2016).

Professional boxing matches are conducted according to the Queensberry Rules, subject to minor amendments since original publication in 1867 (Woodward, 2014; Oates, 2006; Shipley, 1989). Within the confines of a boxing ring – a square platform covered in canvas, with pillars in each

corner, between which are strung four rows of rope – two boxers, fists in gloves, aim to punch one another in the head and upper body over a number of rounds (Sheard, 1997). Matches are scored according to a ten-point system, meaning: 'The winner of a complete round shall be entitled to ten (10) points and the opponent to a proportional smaller number' (WBA rules, 2015: E.2). To win a round, the boxer must connect with, or 'land', more punches than the other boxer. If both boxers land equal numbers of punches, both score 10 points. If one lands more punches than the other, but the fight is competitive, the scorecard might read 10-9 for that round. Two points may be deducted from a boxer who is knocked down, but able to continue. Points may also be deducted for breaking the rules (*e.g.* biting, hitting below the belt/outside of the permitted target areas) (Boddy, 2011). The beginning and end of a round is signalled by the ringing of a bell. Fights that 'go the distance' *i.e.* to the final bell of the final round, are assessed via judges' scorecards, who judge the contest from outside of the ring (Sugden, 1996), providing each boxer with a score out of 10 for each round. Whichever boxer scores highest on these scorecards wins the match on points (Sheard, 1997).

Other ways of winning are as follows: if a boxer is knocked down, 10 seconds are counted by the referee (who oversees from inside the ring). If the boxer is unable to stand within these 10 seconds, the opponent is declared the winner by knockout (KO). If the boxer can stand, but is unfit to continue, the opponent is declared the winner by technical knockout (TKO). The referee may also stop the contest if a boxer is unable to continue to fight, regardless of whether they have been knocked down. This is also a TKO victory for the other boxer (Association of Boxing Commissions, 2016).

Contests vary in terms of number of rounds, as do the length of the rounds. This is summarised in The BBBofC Rules: 'No contest shall exceed 12 rounds nor be less than 8 minutes of actual boxing. Rounds shall be of 3 minute duration with an interval between each round of 1 minute. In Contests of 10 rounds or less the rounds may be of 2 minute duration' (BBBofC Rules, 2016: 3.7). Contests only take place between boxers in the same weight class. There are 17 'standard' weight divisions in professional boxing ranging from Minimumweight/Mini Flyweight (upper limit, 7 ½ stone/ 47,627 kg/ 105lbs) to Heavyweight (no upper limit, minimally 14.4 stone/ 90.892 kg/ 200lbs) (BoxRec, 2016).

Though professional boxing is now conducted according to (a slightly elaborated version of) The Queensberry Rules, prizefighting (Gorn, 1986) – bareknuckle boxing for money, under different rules – predates this by over a century (Boddy, 2008). On a rudimental level, the history of professional boxing is as follows: professional boxing (prizefighting) was first codified in England in 1743 under Broughton's Rules, named after their creator and boxing champion Jack Broughton (Vamplew, 2007). Broughton's Rules were superseded by the London Prize Ring Rules in 1838 (amended 1853). The London Prize Ring Rules were extended and developed into the Queensberry Rules 1865, named after John Sholto Douglas, the ninth Marquis of Queensberry (Boddy, 2008) who sponsored their creation (Gems, 2014). The rules of boxing have henceforth been 'fairly consistent' (Woodward, 2014: 132).

The shift from Broughton's to Queensberry Rules can be understood as a modernising project (Vamplew, 2007, Gems, 2014). As Sugden (1996: 28) notes: 'regulations, governing bodies, structures of competition, weight classifications, rules governing equipment and so forth' were all established with the Queensberry Rules and 'they continue to define the sport today'. For instance, all the following notably became written into the boxing code under the Queensberry Rules: the limitation of offensive techniques to punching to the upper body and head (previously wrestling throws and hitting whilst on the ground were permitted). Time limits, both in terms of round length, and the number of rounds themselves, thereby making the sport safer through limiting the amount of fighting boxers were permitted to endure (Boddy, 2008). Though weight categories had previously existed, 'it was not until... after the widespread adoption of the Queensberry Rules that a real effort was made to standardise weight divisions' allowing 'boxing skill to have greater impact on the outcome of a contest than extra poundage or extra reach [i.e. weight and length of arms]' (Sheard, 1997: 36). Boxing gloves were also enforced as a mandatory part of competition with the adoption of the Queensberry Rules (Boddy, 2011). This introduction did not necessarily make boxing safer, but had the appearance of doing so (Sheard, 1997).

This modernising project should be viewed within the context of industrialisation, of which it is also a product, and arguably producer (Boddy, 2008, Sugden, 1996). Pre-Queensberry prizefighting was a popular feature of cultural life in pre-industrial Britain (Gorn, 1986), and had been financed

by the old, pre-industrial rural aristocracy through a system of patronage (Boddy, 2008). Industrialisation, however, produced a new, urban 'fledgling ruling class' for whom 'pugilism was an especially attractive target... because it brought together both of their class enemies: a decadent, dying aristocracy, and an ill-disciplined, pre-industrial labour force' (Sugden, 1996: 20-21). Prizefighting spectacles were deemed 'objectionable' due to the gathering of 'large crowds, gambling, drunkenness, and dissolute behaviour' (Harrow, 2016: 8) ill-suited to the time-regulated conditions of working life under industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1967), and as Sugden (1996: 29) notes: '[i]t was difficult to square Victorian notions of order and respectability with the relatively anarchic blood baths of the prize ring'. However, 'the ideological interweaving of social Darwinism, rugged athleticism and muscular Christianity' (Sugden, 1996: 29) underpinning life in industrialised, Victorian Britain 'encouraged the view that a suitably codified, controlled and gloved version' of the sport was 'acceptable for both the physical training and vicarious entertainment of young gentlemen' (Sugden, 1996: 29).

Boxing has almost invariably always been a sport of the working classes (Woodward, 2014) and professional boxing can readily be understood as primarily a working-class occupation (Woodward, 2007; Gems, 2014). Boxing under the Queensberry Rules however originated as 'a diversion for a privileged elite' (Sugden, 1996: 27) in the late 1800s. The Queensberry Rules were originally developed as a code for amateur boxing (discussed in 2.3) to separate the 'gentleman boxer' (Downing, 2010: 340) from the 'barbarities' (Sheard, 1997: 50) of professional prizefighting, to make boxing viable within a society increasingly concerned with 'civility' (Boddy, 2008; 2011). Clearly, gender figures in this arrangement in addition to class (Downing, 2010; Boddy, 2008), discussed in the following chapter. For now, though, with Boddy (2011: 399), it is important to note that the 'Queensberry Rules did not simply regularize existing practices; they suggested that an activity that many refused to accept was a sport (prizefighting) could be refashioned to make it closely resemble an activity whose sporting credentials were clear (sparring)'.

The Queensberry Rules were not instantly adopted by prizefighters. Indeed, they were initially actively rejected (Boddy, 2011). The last British championship prize-fight (clandestinely) conducted bareknuckle was in 1885, approximately twenty years post-Queensberry Rules (Sheard, 1997).

Whilst not directly outlawed in the 1860s, there were multiple public order laws that could be used to halt prizefighting events (Boddy, 2008). In short, the consolidation of power over law-and-order, and over cultural life *en masse*, by the urban bourgeoisie, meant that professional boxing, undertaken according to the Queensberry Rules, replaced prizefighting (Boddy, 2008; Sugden, 1996). Indeed, the creation of amateur boxing provided a pool of fighters adept to competition in this form of the sport, ensuring its success (Sugden, 1996). Amateur boxing will now be discussed further.

### **2.3 Amateur Boxing**

Amateur boxing primarily differs from professional boxing as there is no monetary reward for competition (Stewart, 2011). Although amateur boxing events do garner audiences, it is not a spectator sport to the same extent as professional boxing, and receives little media attention by comparison (Woodward, 2014), perhaps bar in the Olympics. Beyond the difference of monetary reward for fighting between amateur and professional boxing, there are some other key differences between these versions of the sport. Amateur boxing has its own regulatory bodies separate to those discussed above for professional boxing. In England, this is the Boxing Association of England, otherwise known as England Boxing (formerly the ABA). Similar organisations exist in most nations (AIBA, 2017). To compete as an amateur boxer, one must be registered with the relevant national body. Like professional boxing, amateur boxing is a globalised sport (Woodward, 2014) and internationally, amateur boxing is overseen by the International Boxing Association (referred to as AIBA, as reflects its original, though now defunct name: Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur).

There are fewer weight divisions in amateur boxing than professional boxing. As with professional boxing, these differ according to gender and weight category of boxer, but tend to have upper and lower limits providing a window of between three and 10 kilograms (AIBA Rules, 2017), these weight classes are nonetheless strict modes of classification (Woodward, 2014). Amateur bouts essentially follow the same rules as those discussed above regarding professional contests (AIBA Rules, 2017). However, they are limited to four rounds of boxing maximum, and three rounds minimum (unless stopped due to KO, TKO, retirement or disqualification). Each round

lasts between two and three minutes, typically three, with a minute's rest between each round. This depends on the age of the boxer and whether the boxer is male or female (Bianco *et al.*, 2013).

Amateur boxing began in England with the creation of the Queensberry Rules in 1867, written by two Cambridge graduates John Graham Chambers and John Sholto Douglas, Marquis of Queensberry (Boddy, 2011). As Boddy (2011: 399) notes, the rules are named after the latter over the former, in that in being an aristocrat, Douglas had 'hoped that his... title would bestow some respectability on a sport that had fallen into disrepute'. The transition from prizefighting to boxing under the Queensberry Rules was generated by a newly-emergent industrial ruling class as a means of consolidating power (Sugden, 1996). Whereas prizefighting was considered as lowly and repugnant by the new urban ruling class (Skinner, 2012), amateur boxing was 'considered to be legitimate' (Sugden, 1996: 27) given the lack of monetary stake (Brailsford, 1985), its codification deemed to ensure 'fair play' and demonstrative of its clear sporting objectives, and therefore its relative appearance of civility in comparison to its predecessors (Sheard, 1997). Indeed, the motto of the amateur boxing association (established in 1880) was 'box, don't fight' (Boddy, 2011: 95), thereby making a distinction between prizefighting and the sport of boxing. This was also 'seen as a means of addressing the emergence of "effeminate" sensibilities among the more affluent classes' under conditions of industrialism, and middle and upper classes ... took classes in the art of sparring, as a means of buttressing their masculinity' (Rhodes, 2011: 363).

For Sugden (1996: 27): 'amateur boxing may have begun as a diversion for a privileged elite, but ... it spread rapidly among the working classes' to the extent that they came to dominate the sport. Reasons for this are also inextricably linked to industrialisation (Boddy, 2008; Gorn, 1986). Urban slums, a product of industrialisation via the migration of workers from rural to urban areas (Williamson, 1990), were overcrowded, dangerous and impoverished living conditions (Emsley, 2005). 19<sup>th</sup> Century social and religious reformers encouraged the establishment of amateur boxing clubs with the view that 'the violence of the street... could be redirected into the gym' (Boddy, 2008: 95). Prizefighting being extant in the 'cultural memory' of the working classes, and amateur boxing offering an officially sanctioned alternative to street fighting, it was instantly attractive (Sugden, 1996: 27). Sugden (1996: 27) therefore notes the shift in participation from the

privileged elite to the urban working classes was in some respects a 'loss' that was 'self-inflicted... through bringing muscular Christianity to the urban poor' via the sport.

More critically, however, and drawing upon Thompson (1967), Sugden (1996: 20) notes that 'in order for capitalism to flourish... it was necessary for [the] fledgling ruling class to be in the vanguard of a comprehensive cultural revolution through which the rhythms of popular life were reconstructed to complement the needs of industry'. The mechanised and organised regimen of work in industrial England requiring fit, healthy and time-obedient workers (Thompson, 1967), and boxing instilling these characteristics (Boddy, 2008; Sheard, 1997), it could be said that the adoption of amateur boxing by the working classes, rather than being a loss, served to benefit the industrial ruling class. The overrepresentation of the working classes in amateur boxing remains a characteristic of the sport (Woodward, 2014; Trimbur, 2013; Beauchez, 2016), addressed in the following chapter.

Whilst amateur boxing was created to be distinct from professional boxing (Skinner, 2012) and is still a separate version of the sport (Stewart, 2011), the former is partly a 'farm' system for the latter (Sugden, 1996, Woodward, 2014). The BBBofC (2016) for instance 'expects that all applicants [for licenses to compete professionally] have had experience in amateur boxing... For anyone striving to get to the top of the professional sport it is almost impossible without first having had a good amateur career'. Equally, it is not *entirely* necessary to have had a long amateur boxing career to turn professional, nor does having a long amateur career necessitate turning professional (Trimbur, 2013).

## **2.4 Unlicensed Boxing**

Unlicensed boxing primarily pertains to competitive boxing not governed or sanctioned by a 'legitimate' boxing authority (e.g. WBO, AIBA). It is rarely reported both inside (for exceptions, see: Jones, 1997; Sugden, 1996; Matthews, 2011; Murphy and Sheard, 2006) and outside academia (Hotten, 1998). Often where mentioned, it is done so in passing. Unlicensed boxing necessarily pre-dates professional and amateur boxing: until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century licences did not exist, whilst boxing did (Boddy, 2008). The creation of boxing regulations may have driven unlicensed boxing underground



(Murphy and Sheard, 2006) and may be a reason for the relative lack of scholarship on the topic. The terms underground and unlicensed do not however imply illegal. Unlicensed boxing rather implies boxing undertaken outside of the regulation of amateur or professional boxing bodies (Hotten, 1998).

Jones (1997) conducted interviews with unlicensed boxers, wherein it emerged that such boxers compete in the sport to make a living, though outside the conventional realm of licensed professional boxing. Similarly, Matthews's (2011) doctoral research centres on a boxing gym, wherein there are three brief references made to unlicensed boxing (97, 99, 264) in these terms. Sugden (1996) also briefly addresses unlicensed boxing, noting that:

local celebrities, sundry bouncers and street fighters are given the opportunity to test their pugilistic skills against one another in the ring. Current and former amateur and professional boxers are not allowed to participate and there are no doctors or official referees in attendance.... Many bouts are pure sham as the contestants push and shove each other about the ring without throwing a serious punch. Some contests however... give the chance to settle old scores and these fights can be brutal (Sugden, 1996: 122).

Between Jones's, Matthews's and Sugden's accounts, the variety of practices unlicensed boxing encompasses become apparent. For Sugden (1996) the ability of unlicensed boxers is inferior to amateur and professional boxers, whereas this is not necessarily the case for Jones (1997). Moreover, for Jones, financial reward for competition is aspect of unlicensed boxing, as is the case for Matthews (2011). This is lacking in Sugden's account, where the motivation is 'settling old scores'. The term unlicensed can be applied to any boxing context that is not regulated by an amateur or professional body. As Hotten (1998: 12) notes 'there are as many versions and varieties as there are fights and fighters. The nature of the game means that it is unregulated and cannot be catalogued, counted, or assessed'.

## **2.5 Recreational Boxing**

Trimbur (2013: 120) refers to recreational boxing, explaining the term pertains to practitioners of the sport 'categorised as neither amateur or

professional'. Recreational boxing 'has a long history' (Trimbur, 2013: 119); '[i]n the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as competitive boxing became more disciplined and the rules of the sport increasingly rationalised, recreational pugilists taught themselves the sport's techniques from manuals in the privacy of their own homes' (Trimbur, 2013: 119). This may have been for the purposes of self-defence, rather than competition (Boddy, 2008). Similarly, those patrons who had financed prizefighting, had also been taught to box by prizefighters for the purposes of self-defence – they did not compete – from the 1700s onwards (Boddy, 2008).

Though recreational boxing has a long history, it may be more popular now than ever before (Hargreaves, 1997; Satterlund, 2006). Whereas recreational boxing may have once primarily been a means of learning self-defence from home, and a reserve of patrons of prizefighters and the aristocracy, it now primarily serves as a means of keeping fit via tough 'workout routines' (Trimbur, 2013: 120) associated with boxing. In this respect, recreational or 'cardio-boxing' (Herrera, 2002) sessions may include: skipping, calisthenics (*i.e.* sit-ups, press-ups, squats, star-jumps *etc.*), bagwork (*i.e.* hitting a boxing punchbag – a large leather bag, typically hanging from the ceiling or a bracket on the wall), padwork (punching pads held by a coach) and weight-training (Trimbur, 2013). Though this is not necessarily the case (Satterlund, 2006), sparring – full-contact, non-competitive boxing training within the confines of the gym – or any other contact element of training, might be absent in recreational boxing. Recreational boxing may also lack the stoic elements of boxing training undertaken to hone technique for competition (*e.g.* shadowboxing, footwork, defence work), as they take longer to perfect and have less immediate bodily payoff. Boxercise is a recent popular example of such training (Hefferon *et al.*, 2013).

Contemporary recreational boxing should be understood as a component of the commercial fitness industry (Trimbur, 2013), which expanded over the second half of the twentieth century, through which the means for bodily 'self-improvement' are commodified for consumption (Maguire, 2008; Crossley, 2006; Sassatelli, 2010). This should be understood within the context of 'the latest stage of capitalist development' (Parrinello, 2004: 381), to which various overlapping labels are ascribed, for instance: 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1973), 'consumer capitalism' (Cerni, 2007: 7) and 'the service economy' (Parrinello, 2004: 381). Fundamentally, all pertain to

the notion that the economic *modus operandi* in the 'global north' or 'economic west' has shifted from the production of 'material goods for exchange' (Cerni, 2007: 7) to the provision of services (Maguire, 2008). As Bauman (2007: 14) notes, we are no longer a 'society of producers' but a 'society of consumers'. This is addressed further in the following section, and in the following chapter.

Trimbur (2013: xviii) defines white-collar boxers as 'recreational athletes'. However, this thesis conceptualises recreational and white-collar boxing as separate entities for the following reasons. Given that overall this thesis is an exploration of white-collar boxing it is prudent to discuss white-collar boxing separately from other forms of recreational boxing. Beyond this instrumental separation, however, there are analytical distinctions. White-collar boxing may be a form of recreational boxing, though they are not synonymous. As discussed above, recreational boxing takes various forms which may be different in character to the white-collar boxing discussed below. As separately suggested by Trimbur (2013) and Hefferon *et al.* (2012) recreational boxing is not a spectator sport, given the lack of public competition involved, whereas white-collar boxing has a spectator component (Trimbur, 2013; Maiolino, 2015). White-collar boxing, at its genesis was a term deliberately employed to differentiate it from other forms of the sport on the lines of social class: 'boxing is the sport of the poor, in spite of intermittent forays of the aristocracy into the ring and more recent celebrations of white-collar boxing' (Woodward, 2014: 61). Finally, white-collar boxing has a novel historical context, directly traceable to post-industrial NYC, which other forms of recreational boxing lack (Trimbur, 2013).

## **2.6 White-Collar Boxing**

Whilst boxing as an entity has existed in some form for over 5000 years, professional boxing dates to at least 1719 (Woodward, 2014), amateur boxing to the 1860s (Sugden, 1996), recreational boxing to at least the eighteenth century (Trimbur, 2013), and unlicensed boxing necessarily pre-dating all of them (Boddy, 2008), white-collar boxing is new in its genesis. The term can be traced directly to Gleason's Gym in NYC in the mid-1980s (Trimbur, 2013). Though Woodward (2014: 61) refers to white-collar boxing in passing, and one article exists analysing a white-collar boxing match

between two prominent Canadian politicians (Maiolino, 2015) Trimbur's (2011a, 2011b, 2013) research, notably undertaken at Gleason's Gym, is the only extant academic account directly concerned with white-collar boxing. Trimbur's research will therefore be a major reference point for this thesis.

From both Maiolino's and Trimbur's research it can be stated that white-collar boxers participate in the public combat dimension of the sport, unlike the recreational boxers discussed in the previous subsection. For Trimbur, though, white-collar boxing matches take the following form: 'three two-minute rounds. No winners or losers are declared. Rather, both participants' hands are raised at the end of the bout, and both boxers receive trophies' (Trimbur, 2013: 14). Unlike professional and amateur boxers who wear 8-12-ounce gloves, depending on the age, weight and gender of the boxer, and mostly do not wear headguards during competition (AIBA Rules, 2015; WBO Rules, 2016) white-collar boxers wear 16-ounce gloves during competition, as well as headguards, sometimes including a nose bar 'so they will not break their noses' (Trimbur, 2013: 124). Despite these safety measures, 'white collar boxing can be more brutal and bloody than amateur or professional fighting' (Trimbur, 2013: 133). This is because white-collar boxers, like non-competitive recreational boxers, tend not to undertake many aspects of boxing training, especially those without immediate bodily gain (Trimbur, 2013). As the various findings chapters of this thesis will indicate, however, this description does not encompass all practices given the title white-collar boxing.

Bob Jackson (a professional boxing coach at Gleason's) and Bruce Silverglade (co-owner of Gleason's) both claim they first used the term white-collar boxing, and Jackson claims to have used the term prior to his employment at Gleason's, at another NYC boxing gym (Trimbur, 2013). However, the first ever white-collar boxing match was in 1988, between a doctor and lawyer who both trained at Gleason's Gym. Following this, Gleason's established a white-collar boxing league. According to Trimbur (2013: 123) Jackson decided to define the participants by what traditional boxing gym enthusiasts were not. Jackson recounts: 'Well most of the people aren't blue collar, they're white collar. And there you are! White-collar boxing!' The term white-collar is a signifier of social class (Mills, 1951) and one which in the NYC context is deliberately employed to differentiate its practitioners from professional and amateur boxers on class lines (Trimbur,

2013). Therefore, from its inception it can be said that white-collar boxing is a class-based practice.

For Trimbur (2013: 11) this 'new version of the sport emerged out of 'postindustrial conditions of possibility'. To summarise: for Trimbur (2013: 1) the term postindustrial is used to encapsulate 'the decline in manufacturing and the acceleration of the FIRE economy – finance, insurance, real estate – in urban centres'. These conditions 'made it difficult for big and neighbourhood gyms... to keep up with the pace of inflation, meet insurance premiums, accommodate rising real estate prices and survive processes of gentrification' (Trimbur, 2013: 7-8) and many boxing gyms in NYC closed. Trimbur (2013: 11) continues however that, whilst subject to these conditions Gleason's 'was able to survive and even thrive because of the gym's reputation and the business savvy of the current owner... who tapped into postindustrial resources to keep the gym open'. These 'resources' should be understood as white-collar clientele, such as 'businessmen, lawyers and doctors' (Trimbur, 2013: 128). Unlike professional and amateur boxing, for which it costs little in monetary terms to train (Wacquant, 2004; Trimbur, 2013), 'trainers charge [white-collar] clients between \$20 and \$75 per hour or per session' for boxing instruction (Trimbur, 2013: 128).

In NYC, white-collar boxing clientele should be understood as distinct from other boxers in that they are exclusively rich white men, whereas most professional and amateur boxers are 'primarily men of colour' (Trimbur, 2013: 18) from working-class backgrounds. The arrangement described should therefore be understood to have been enabled by social and economic forms of racism (Trimbur, 2013: 141), further producing 'new forms of anti-black racism' (Trimbur, 2013: 118) via the commodification of black, working-class masculinity for consumption by white middle-and-upper class men 'as a means to develop an identity' (Trimbur, 2013: *xix*). Race has historically coordinated practice in boxing, and continues to do so (Woodward, 2004) of which this is one recently emergent example.

According to Trimbur, white-collar boxing in NYC is for men only. Women do train at Gleason's, indeed, as is the case with other white-collar clients, they are financially 'invaluable to the gym' (Trimbur, 2013: 15). However, women are variously constructed as belonging to various social groups, all of which are exclusively positions occupied by females and all separate to the social category of white-collar boxer, a category held by and assigned to males.

The existence of women's white-collar boxing organisations domestically (e.g. Pink Collar Boxing, 2017) suggests that Trimbur's findings are not entirely valid as a means of understanding white-collar boxing beyond the context of their production.

More generally, given that boxing practices differ across time and space (Woodward, 2014) it should not be necessarily assumed that Trimbur's research reflects white-collar boxing outside of the USA. Trimbur (2013) does however extend findings on white-collar boxing in the USA to the United Kingdom, as well as various large cities around the world. Given the lack of scholarly knowledge of white-collar boxing beyond Trimbur's research context, and wishing to further guide this research, various non-academic sources will be discussed below, which further suggest that there may be differences in white-collar boxing between Trimbur's context and white-collar boxing in England.

England Boxing makes the following statement on white-collar boxing: 'England Boxing will... receive requests for membership from boxers with unlicensed/white collar boxing experience' (England Boxing, 2016). Prior to 2014, unlicensed/white-collar boxers could not apply for an amateur license: unlicensed fighting entails gaining experience that is unrecorded, meaning that any amateur record in terms of losses and wins will not reflect the actual competitive record of the boxer. This has been circumvented via the reclassification of unlicensed boxing as 'other combat sport' (England Boxing, 2016). The above potentially indicates that white-collar boxing in England should be understood as an interchangeable term for unlicensed boxing, and not understood as a form of the sport reflective of that discussed by Trimbur above.

In popular media (e.g. Rossington, 2016) it is noted that former professional British middleweight champion Nick Blackwell, started his boxing career as a 'white-collar boxer'. Equally, Blackwell has noted that: 'I started off fighting as an unlicensed fighter... I should have taken the ABA (Amateur Boxing Association) route... but didn't know the difference between the two at the time' (Chia Charge website, 2014). The terms white-collar and unlicensed seem to be used interchangeably in Blackwell's case. This indicates further that, in contemporary domestic boxing lexicon, unlicensed and white-collar boxing may potentially be used in lieu of one another. It is also, therefore, a potential indication that whilst white-collar boxing in

England is nominally identical to the white-collar boxing researched by Trimbur (2013), that they are not necessarily the same in practice.

The following is taken from the company website of White Collar Boxing London – one of many white-collar boxing promotions in the UK:

White Collar Boxing? Sure, you know about that, a bunch of posh boys, bankers probably, slogging it out in front of their middle management peers at an anonymous black tie gala somewhere in the Square Mile. While, yes, that is an accurate picture of some evening's entertainment, it's increasingly becoming the exception rather than the rule (White Collar Boxing London, 2016).

This can be taken to suggest that white-collar boxing in the UK does not necessarily mirror white-collar boxing in the NYC context, wherein Wall Street bankers form a key market for white-collar boxing participation (Trimbur, 2013) and who occupy a comparable position to those bankers working in London's financial district. This extract must be treated cautiously, in that White Collar Boxing London are a private organisation without necessarily care for accuracy in their promotional material. Some, though not all, white-collar boxing in Britain is however *prima facie* free in monetary terms (True White Collar Boxing, 2017; Pink Collar Boxing, 2017) suggesting there is not an exclusionary, high cost for participation and consumption as there is in NYC. At the very least, it suggests that further investigation into the social dynamics of white-collar boxing might be prudent. As Berger (1963: 34) notes: 'the first wisdom of sociology is this – things are not what they seem'. The first research question this thesis therefore seeks to address is: *what is white-collar boxing?*

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter did not intend to be an exhaustive history of boxing, but an overview of boxing practices with an indication of their historical development, to contextualise the emergence of white-collar boxing. Throughout this chapter it has been suggested that boxing must be viewed in relation to social class, and with attention to the economic conditions in and through which various forms of boxing emerged. Compared to other

forms of the sport, white-collar boxing is in its infancy, having emerged in NYC the late 1980s, as a product of post-industrialisation.

The term white-collar is employed in the NYC context as to deliberately signify that its practitioners are of a different social class to the majority of boxers, past and present. There is little extant scholarship on white-collar boxing, beyond the work of Trimbur and therefore beyond the original context of its production. At this stage, it can be tentatively stated that there are differences between white-collar boxing in NYC and elsewhere. Whereas women are excluded from white-collar boxing in Trimbur's research context, the existence of women's white-collar boxing organisations in England suggests otherwise. Similarly, white-collar boxing has been noted as synonymous with unlicensed boxing in the domestic context. A foremost aim of this thesis is therefore to contribute to knowledge of this newly-emergent form of boxing. Based on this overview, the first research question to be addressed in this thesis is: *what is white-collar boxing?*

Though at points it has been necessary to discuss boxing with reference to its existence as it is embedded within society, the content in the chapter above largely appears without sociological context. For instance, both amateur boxing and white-collar boxing were class-based practices at their inception. Similarly, boxing has mostly been undertaken by men. Similarly again, although this is but one example of the salience of race to understanding boxing, via Trimbur it was established that boxing practices are informed by race. The following chapter discusses extant scholarship relevant to the interests of this study, in relation to social class, gender and race to further guide the empirical dimension of this thesis.



### 3. White-Collar Boxing and Social Divisions

#### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 identified the research question: *what is white-collar boxing?* This question has already been partially answered: it is a distinctly late-modern version of the sport originating in NYC, and exclusively undertaken in this context by elites, for instance: bankers, celebrities, and lawyers. This research finds its empirical context not in NYC, but in the Midlands of England. It has been demonstrated that further research is necessary, given the variation of boxing practices across time and space, and the differences between white-collar boxing in Britain and the USA highlighted via initial analysis of primary data.

Woodward (2004: 10) notes that, 'boxing is deeply implicated with social structures of gender, race and class'. Though the previous chapter articulated that boxing must be understood in the context of social class, and suggested that race and gender are significant in this regard, it was largely absent of direct sociological content. This chapter therefore assesses sociological literature on boxing to guide the empirical dimensions of this thesis. Though this thesis embraces intersectionality, and indeed the discussion below is essentially a discussion of intersectionality, for the purposes of clarity, the chapter is ordered separately according to class, gender and race. These categories are not discrete, but each section retains an emphasis on one of these divisions, whilst referring to other social divisions.

Identity matters in boxing (Woodward, 2007; Wacquant, 2004; Trimbur, 2013). In the previous chapter, it was noted that in the NYC context identity is consumed by white-collar boxers through participation, via the commodification of black, working-class masculinity. White-collar boxing in this research context entails an eight-week training programme which offers participants transit from 'rookie to Rocky'. This style of training does not exist in white-collar boxing as reported by Trimbur. Moreover, as indicated in the previous chapter, the term white-collar might be misleading beyond the NYC context. A wider discussion of identity in late modernity is therefore necessary. Adams (2006: 511-512, original emphasis) notes that 'two dominant tropes have emerged in the sociology of identity in recent years,

broadly clustered around notions of *self-reflexivity* and *habitus*'. Another way of saying this is that there are two major camps in the sociology of identity, formed around the sociologies of Bauman and Bourdieu (Blackshaw, 2013). Given that the previous chapter identified white-collar boxing as a late modern identity project, and that boxing has been more widely understood as an important site for the construction of identity, this chapter will discuss identity in white-collar boxing via engagement with these two bodies of thought as a guide for further research.

### **3.2 Boxing and Social Class**

As ascertained in the previous chapter, boxing has been understood as a working-class sport, though with some historical heterogeneity (Woodward, 2014; Boddy, 2008). The previous chapter however was almost exclusively descriptive, lacking sociological insight into why this is the case. White-collar boxing is nominally a class-based practice (Trimbur, 2013) and one that initially jars with the history of boxing (Woodward, 2014). This section therefore addresses literature on boxing and social class, ultimately to guide the empirical dimension of this research. To do this, it is first necessary to briefly discuss social class more generally.

#### **3.2.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Class**

As Bottero (2004: 999) notes: '[t]he meaning of 'class', in academic and popular usage, is notoriously slippery, partly because hierarchy and inequality take on such diverse aspects'. There are multiple ways in which class has been theorised (e.g. Marxist - Marx, 1972; Wright, 1997; Weberian - Weber, 1978; Goldthorpe, 1987; Bourdieusian - Bourdieu, 2010; Savage *et al.*, 2015). This research is not intended to contribute to the debates over the merits and limitations of the multiple variations of competing models of class, in that it is concerned with analysing white-collar boxing *through* the lens of class (in conjunction with other social divisions). Crompton (2008: 9) notes that an 'eminently sensible' way to select a model of class within which to operate is as a matter of 'horses for courses'. Working within a Bourdieusian understanding of class entails subscribing to what is 'fast becoming a new orthodoxy' in class analysis (Bradley, 2014: 430). In sociological studies of sport, including boxing, Bourdieusian theory has

proven fruitful (e.g. White and Wilson, 1999; Wacquant, 2004; Bourdieu, 1988b). The adoption of Bourdieu's theory of class is preferable here, as it centres on consumption practices rather than production (Bourdieu, 2010), and this thesis is concerned with consumption. Indeed, under post-industrialism (Bell, 1973) situation in relation to the product is less meaningful in terms of economic class (Savage *et al.* 2015) meaning that an analysis oriented to *social* class may be preferable.

'Habitus' is used by Bourdieu (1986, 2000, 2010) to understand lifestyle in relation to 'social space' (Bourdieu, 2010: 120); a 'system of relations' (Bourdieu, 1989: 16) the dimensions of which being 'volume and composition of... capital' (Bourdieu, 2010: 120). Wacquant, a *protégé* and collaborator of Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) notes that habitus is a means of 'transcending the antinomy between the individual and the collective' (Wacquant 2004: 17). This is perhaps a poor choice of words – antinomies cannot *per se* be transcended – but it can be taken to mean that habitus is a theory of embodiment in which the 'collective' becomes 'individualised' (Bourdieu, 2000, 2010; Wacquant, 2011; Skeggs, 1997) and through which 'schemes of perception, thought and action' (Bourdieu, 1989: 14) can be understood as 'transindividual' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 150). Habitus can therefore be studied as 'the idiosyncratic product of a singular social trajectory and set of life experiences' (Wacquant, 2014: 120) but also 'indicates that sets of dispositions vary by social location' (Wacquant, 2011: 86). Social space 'is constructed in such a way that the closer the agents, groups or institutions which are situated within this space, the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer' (Bourdieu, 1989: 16). Dispositions – for example 'eating, speaking and gesturing' (Reay, 2004: 433), 'feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 70) – whilst embodied, are socially formed in these terms. In other words, different habituses are formed along the lines of social class (Bourdieu, 2010). This has particular implications for sport (Bourdieu, 1988b), sport being embodied practice, and boxing in particular (Atkinson, 2015; Bourdieu, 2010) as will now be discussed.

### **3.2.2 Boxing, Class and Taste**

Bourdieu (2010) argues that the dominant class come to highly value 'the abstract': products or activities for reasons beyond the physically

immediate. Atkinson (2010: 49) explains further, that differences in taste derive from capital possession: 'with those in the upper regions of social space, possessing plentiful stocks of capital, being subject to an overall distance from necessity while those in the lower sections, holding less capital, are somewhat closer to its demands and urgencies' a situation is created in which the former privilege 'form over function' or 'manner over matter'. This thesis is applied to sports contexts (Washington and Karen, 2001; White and Wilson, 1999). As Bourdieu (1988a: 154) notes: 'social distance is very easily retranslated in the logic of sports'. For example, that in France wrestling is undertaken by the working classes, whereas aikido by the middle-classes can for Bourdieu be explained in these terms: '[i]f one understands so easily the opposition between wrestling and aikido, it is because the opposition between "earthy," "virile," "body-to-body," and "airy," "light," "distanced," "gracious" goes beyond the playing-field of sports'. This has implications for boxing which will now be discussed, to understand if, how and why social class informs practice in white-collar boxing.

For Bourdieu, sports such as boxing combine:

all the features which repel the dominant class: not only in the social composition of their public, which redoubles their commonness, but also the values and virtues demanded, strength, endurance, violence, 'sacrifice', docility and submission to collective discipline – so contrary to the bourgeois 'role distance' – and the exaltation of competition (Bourdieu, 2010: 212).

This statement could be read as to indicate that boxers are 'pushed' (Wacquant, 1995a) into the sport, determined to partake in the physical as a direct result of being in possession of low capital stocks. Indeed, a criticism of Bourdieusian theory is that it is overly-deterministic (Jenkins, 1992). This kind of criticism is levied at essentially any theory that invokes the supra-individual (*i.e.* the social) as being constitutive of individual action (McLennan, 2011), and cannot be addressed at length in this thesis.

However, Bourdieusians do address this issue. Both Bourdieu and Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Wacquant, 2014, 2015) note that habitus is deliberately employed in order to overcome deterministic understandings

of social action: 'social agents are not passive beings pulled and pushed about by external forces, but skilful creatures who actively construct social reality' (Wacquant, 2014a: 24) in reaction to, though also within, social space. In relation to boxing, and sport more generally, Bourdieu (2010: 212) notes that 'at different times... the same practices have been able to attract aristocratic or popular devotees' and that this 'should warn us against the temptation of trying to explain the class distribution of sports purely in terms of the 'nature' of the various activities'. As noted in Chapter 2, boxing in nineteenth century Britain was undertaken by the urban bourgeoisie to buttress their masculinity (Rhodes, 2011) *i.e.* the object becomes valued for what it can offer to its (potential) bearers given social context.

For Wacquant (2004: 17) therefore 'one cannot understand the relatively closed world of boxing outside of the human and ecological context in which it is anchored and the social possibles [*sic*] of which this context is the bearer'. Wacquant's research context - Woodlawn Boys Club - was situated in an 'African-American community' in Chicago's South Side ghetto: 'an urban and social fabric in agony after nearly a half-century of continual deterioration and increased racial and economic segregation' (Wacquant, 2004: 18). The shift discussed in Chapter 2 to a service economy, together with deindustrialisation, means that manual jobs, which were under conditions of industrialism a source of respectable identity for working class men, are now in decline. Trimbur (2013: 22) has therefore noted that 'physical work in the gym' allows for the development of 'identities traditionally associated with formal work, but in a postindustrial landscape' wherein physical work is otherwise absent. Wacquant (1995a: 502) notes similar: that 'boxing is a working-class occupation is reflected... in the *physical* nature of the activity'. Given these conditions, those 'who embrace [boxing] seek literally to fashion themselves into a new being to escape the common determinations that bear upon them and the social insignificance to which these determinations condemn them' (Wacquant, 1995a: 501). Others have noted similar (Jump, 2017; Sugden, 1996; Beauchez, 2015).

### **3.2.3 Boxing as a Career**

Boxing is referred to as a career both inside (Sugden, 1985; Wacquant, 2001; Heiskanen 2006; Trimbur, 2013) and outside of academia (*e.g.* Mailer, 1991; BBBofC, 2016). As Goffman (1961: 119) notes, career entails

'changes... in the person's self', the self being not only 'felt identity' but how one is recognised by others. Bourdieu (1989: 17) states habitus can be understood as deriving 'what Goffman calls the "sense of one's place"' included in which is understanding of distinction from others. Career then can be understood to pertain to the reformulation of habitus through engagement in particular fields of action, and both amateur (Wacquant, 2004; Trimbur, 2013; Heiskanen, 2006) and professional boxing can be understood in terms of career in this way. As Wacquant notes (2004: 15) 'the monastic... character of the pugilistic "program of life"... invites [the boxer] to discover himself, better yet produce himself. And membership in the gym... allows the boxer to... attract the admiration and the approval of the local society'.

Time is particularly salient to the understanding of boxing (Oates, 2006). Wacquant (1995a: 504) notes that 'it takes years of arduous and intensive training... to acquire proper command of the game. Most trainers estimate that a minimum of three to four years are necessary to produce a proficient amateur fighter and an additional three years to mold a competent pro'. Though Sugden (1985: 201) does not provide a definite time-frame in which a boxing career can be forged, he does imply that it can take longer than six years to become a professional boxer: 'the age range of the juniors who frequent the [boxing gym] is somewhere between ten and sixteen, the point at which a boxer must either become an amateur or give up the sport'. Nonetheless, Sugden (1985, 1996), Wacquant (1995b, 2004) and others (Woodward, 2007; Paradis, 2012; Oates, 2006) suggest that long-term engagement in the sport is required to craft an identity as pugilist.

In the context of boxing, however, this can also be understood as bodily labour and the accumulation of body capital (Wacquant, 1995b, Woodward, 2007). That is, a body with an exchange value 'that can be sold and valorized on the pugilistic market' (Wacquant 2001: 188). Woodward (2007: 77) accordingly notes that 'boxing clearly illustrates the importance of bodily attributes operating as a currency and the necessity for those involved to engage actively in making their own bodies through training activities in order to maximise their returns'. Likewise, Sugden (1996: 188) notes that '[p]rofessional sport is one of the few occupations for which labour and the product of labour are contained within the same physical form, the human body'. Professional boxing can therefore be understood as a career in its narrower sense of the bid for the accumulation of economic capital too,

additionally to the production of self; 'Boxers relish at being right at 'the point of production' being *self-made* men in the literal sense that they produce themselves through daily bodily work in the gym and out' (Wacquant, 2001: 188-189).

Whilst perceived as an 'escape' (Wacquant, 2004: 17), a professional boxing career, however, does not afford complete freedom to those fighting. 'As with any career, money plays a central role in professional boxing' (Simpson and Wrisberg, 2013: 114). Managers, trainers, promoters, match makers, all take 'their cut', meaning boxers' 'earnings are usually seriously depleted' (Sugden, 1996: 51). Moreover, televised professional boxing entails the rights to air matches being brought by the highest bidder, who, through advertising and pay-per-view charges profit from those fighting in the ring (Woodward, 2014). Though boxing is widely referred to in the language of exploitation (Wacquant, 2001; Sugden, 1996; Woodward, 2014), whether this can be understood as exploitation *per se* is debatable. Promoters arguably do not 'take' a cut, as much as they *make* a cut, that is produce value via inflation of fight purses. As Wacquant (2001: 190) notes: 'promoters are just doing their job when they earn money from the sweat and toil of others'. From all of the above, however, it can be noted that in various ways, whilst boxers create value from their bodily work, others also profit from fighters. Professional boxers are not 'dupes' in this regard, they are aware of the ways in which others profit from their bodies. They collude in this arrangement for what it offers in comparison to the deindustrialised labour market, discussed throughout this section (Wacquant, 2001; Woodward, 2007).

### **3.2.4 White-Collar Boxing and Social Class**

As a reminder: for Trimbur (2013: 9) white-collar boxers are 'upper-middle and upper-class men' of 'considerable means' (Trimbur, 2013: *xviii*). White-collar boxing therefore presents something of a conundrum for the analysis represented above (Abramson and Modzelewski, 2011). Beyond Trimbur's scholarship (2013), there is a general paucity of research on white-collar boxing, and therefore a lack of research pertaining to the classed dynamics of this version of the sport. However, Satterlund (2006; 2012) presents a limited body of analogous literature concerned with recreational boxing, and together these scholars suggest that white-collar boxing can be understood

as consumption of the commodified other as a means of identity construction.

'Consumer adventure' (Satterlund, 2012: 356) is a common feature of both recreational and white-collar boxing (Satterlund, 2006; Trimbur, 2013). To this effect Trimbur (2013: 125) notes that white-collar boxers may attend three-day 'fantasy boxing camps' in remote, rural retreats wherein they receive an indoctrination to the sweet science 'from ex-world champions', at the cost of between \$1850 to \$3150 USD. At the end of such fantasy camps white-collar boxers compete against one another in the ring. In both contexts, 'middle-class men' train alongside professionals on a recreational basis. Reasons for this are that recreational boxers 'wanted an authentic boxing experience that was physical and seemingly "working-class"' (Satterlund, 2012: 540). Likewise, one of Trimbur's (2013: 137) white-collar participants notes: 'We are proud to be members of their low-class club. We want to be low class'. Whether this participant actually wants to be 'low class' is debatable; white-collar boxers do not wish to be shorn of capital and the privileges capital affords. Indeed, Trimbur (2013: 139) notes: 'a fairly inauthentic form of the sport is simulated' consumable for those 'with money' and achievable with only 'little training'.

White-collar boxing therefore seems to exemplify elements of Bauman's (1996) understanding of identity formation in late modernity as a touristic practice. As Bauman notes, identity is now formed through 'adventures' (Bauman, 1996: 30); we are tourists continually on 'the hunt' (Bauman, 2011) for identity to be consumed (Jacobsen, 2012). Whereas in first modernity, identity was relatively unchanging and stable, for Bauman, in liquid, that is late modern times, it must be sought: identities are now 'momentary' and only 'until-further-notice' (Bauman, 1992: 694). Tourism is a metaphor for Bauman (Howard, 2017), though it does perhaps also work well on a literal basis in the case of white-collar boxing. Conceptualised above, white-collar boxing is a short-term engagement in the sport as a means of identity construction. It was post-industrial conditions of possibility that produced white-collar boxing (Trimbur, 2013), and whereas identity was once 'determined primarily by the productive role played in the division of labour' (Bauman, 2004: 45), the formula for identity for Bauman, is under post-industrialism *Consumo Ergo Sum*, or, 'I shop, therefore I am' (Bauman, 2013b: 60). Indeed, white-collar boxers in Trimbur's research are effectively shopping for identity.



There may, however, be limits to the utility of Bauman's thought here. For Nilsen (2017:189-190) 'Bauman distances himself from *Distinction*. He argues that ties between culture, class and stratification are broken'. There is no identity outside of consumption for Bauman, and in being *white-collar* boxing there is an identity being made in terms of employment. Moreover, the amateur and professional boxers in Trimbur's context are commodified, themselves not consuming, whilst still being identifiable. Being career boxers, professional boxers could perhaps be understood as 'pilgrims' (Bauman, 1996). Whereas Bauman (2013b) notes that consumption initiates being, those boxers (other than white-collar boxers) occupy and reproduce a habitus that is outside of consumption. The implication here is that there has not been a shift *from* pilgrim *to* tourist, as is Bauman's (1996) suggestion, but that the commodification of pilgrimage is on offer, for those who can afford it, to be touristically consumed. Whilst being a short-term consumption of identity, class distinction informs consumption in and of white-collar boxing, *contra* the statement from Bauman above.

Trimbur (2013: 14) extends findings about white-collar boxing in the USA to various other national contexts, without empirical examination. As noted in the previous chapter, in the domestic context 'white-collar' is a misnomer, meaning that Trimbur's (2013) theory is inapplicable. All the above is therefore a provisional guide to the empirical dimension of this thesis. White-collar is a signifier of social class (Mills, 2002), but in white-collar boxing in the UK, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, this signification is misleading. Beck, upon whom Bauman has recurrently drawn and who can be situated within the same movement of social theory (Dawson, 2012), has noted that articulations of social class in late modernity are effectively meaningless. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 27) social class is now a 'zombie category'. It may be that white-collar boxing is a zombie articulation of social class. Moreover, for both Beck and Bauman, the individualisation of social life is a result of those changes to economy that ultimately first produced white-collar boxing. This therefore retains some intuitive appeal. Beck and Bauman are contested, particularly on Bourdieusian lines (Atkinson 2008, 2010; Reay, 2006), however given the above it should not be entirely disregarded at this stage. The starting point for this research is to establish whether it is 'white-collar people' (Mills, 2002: ix) who participate in white-collar boxing, rather than to assume that this is the case, even though its name would seem to imply that this is necessarily so. This will be addressed at various points throughout this thesis, but particularly in Chapter 6.

### **3.3 White-Collar Boxing and Gender**

#### **3.3.1 Sport, Boxing and Gender**

Sport (re)produces gender (Frey and Eitzen, 1991), and in particular masculinity (Kimmel, 1994; Connell, 2005). Boxing is a particularly salient site for the analysis of gender (Woodward, 2007; Matthews, 2016), given that it has been understood as 'a purely masculine activity' (Oates, 2006: 70). White-collar boxing is a relatively new phenomenon (Trimbur, 2013) about which little is known in general, and therefore regarding its gendered dynamics. The above suggests that white-collar boxing in NYC entails upper-class men consuming racialized, working-class masculinity through participation (Trimbur, 2013). However, this arrangement seems not to be the case in the British context (Chapter 2). It is therefore wise to further examine more widely how boxing practices have been arranged in terms of gender as guide to understanding if, how and why white-collar boxing operates according to gender in this research context.

Given that this thesis is not only concerned with gender within the context of white-collar boxing, but other social divisions too, and compounded by the notion that it 'is a very slippery concept' (MacInnes, 1998: 76) gender must be pragmatically approached. Whilst essentialist, biological approaches to understanding gender imply that men and women are by birth determined to behave differently, and therefore occupy different social roles (Holmes, 2007), this view is deeply discredited, given that men and women have occupied different social roles over time and space (Whitehead, 2002; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994). Indeed, gender is often rudimentarily presented as being distinct from sex (Holmes, 2007).

Butler (1999) notes however that, '[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender'. Whilst we 'do' (Butler, 1999: 41) gender, the implication of performance is not however that we make active choices to 'punch "like a guy"' (Littaye, 2016: 1), or 'throw like a girl' (Young, 2005) but that gender becomes embodied and naturalised (Butler, 1999). This understanding of gender is cogent with the above expounded understanding of social class as embodied in terms of habitus (McNay, 1999; Skeggs, 1997). As Bourdieu (1988a: 143) notes that habitus entails 'the law of the social body' becoming 'immanent in biological bodies' causing 'individual agents to realise the law of the social body without intentionally or consciously obeying it' so does Butler (1999: xv) note that 'performativity... achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body'.

Gender then, whilst not being biologically determined, does still 'seem to be all about the body' (Edwards, 2006: 140), or perhaps rather bodies, as they come to be classified and socially organised, along and within the lines of sex. As MacInnes (1998: 11-12) notes gender relates to the social domination of men over women and 'not 'feminines' by 'masculines' were there such things'. In this respect, it is pertinent to note that 'boxers along with other people who actively participate in the sport do not share these fluid categorisations but adopt classifications based upon gender differences, often involving polarized oppositions that are perceived to be firmly embedded and embodied' (Woodward, 2008: 28). Similar has been noted by Satterlund (2006) and Matthews (2016): biologically essentialist understandings of gender prevail in the sport. Whilst gender is independent of bodies, in the practice of boxing by-and-large, gender and sex coalesce as a bodily performance perceived as natural by practitioners. Indeed, for this reason, Woodward (2014: 11) argues that 'sex is a necessary category' in boxing research, coupled with gender.

### **3.3.2 Boxing, Gender and Embodiment**

When Connell (2005: 83) states that '[m]ost episodes of major violence... are transactions among men', this does not mean that violence is an inherently manly practice, but rather that 'violence is part of a system of domination' (Connell, 2005: 84). Likewise, it should not be understood as self-evident that it has almost exclusively been men and not women who have undertaken boxing (De Garis, 2000; Matthews, 2016). As Hargreaves (1997: 35) notes 'women's boxing can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries'. From the limited (Hargreaves, 2003; Godoy-Pressland, 2015) historical accounts of women's boxing, it can however be stated that female boxers have been marginalised (Hargreaves, 1994; Smith, 2014), symbolically excluded for defying the binary social logic of gender that overall corporeally excluded women. Female boxers have been constructed as 'monstrous' (Oates, 2006: 73) 'she-devils' (Smith, 2014: 6-7), in other words abnormal, inhuman and evil (Moi, 1985), seen to be in defiance of the perceived natural order, wherein men are aggressive and women are nurturing. As Hargreaves (1997: 37) notes: 'the female boxer was the very denial of the supposed essence of femininity'.

For Lidner (2012: 464) '[m]ost physical contact sports, such as boxing, wrestling, football/soccer, rugby and basketball are often considered male or masculine sports as they encourage and reward behaviours and bodily forms typically associated with masculinity: physical power, strength, violence, aggression and muscularity'. Drawing upon Wacquant and Butler, Channon (2013: 14) notes, based on a combat sports context, that there is a 'silent pedagogy of gender' across social life which produces and reinforces:

'dominant codes of prevailing gender logic, patriarchal discourses of masculine 'superiority' and feminine 'weakness' become embodied, being normalized and 'naturalized' through disciplined, repeated bodily performances'.

Similar has been noted by Young (2005: 34): '[w]omen often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy'. Young identifies this not as natural disposition, but as naturalised, invoking both Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Butler's notion of performance (Young, 2005: 26). In this regard, based on autoethnographic research, Nash (2015) – a female amateur boxer – reflects on sparring, noting that: '[w]omen are taught to defend themselves against an attack but they are rarely encouraged to initiate one... I found it physically and psychologically difficult to punch Julie hard' (Nash, 2015: 11). Trimbур (2013: 97) notes similar: '[m]any women are ambivalent about harming their opponents, believing they cannot initiate violence. This is a gendered phenomenon, which is represented by women as innate or inherent'.

There has been a global increase in women participating in boxing (Godoy-Pressland, 2015; Kipnis and Caudwell, 2015). Considering that myriad scholars (Wacquant, 2004; Sugden, 1996; Weinberg and Arond, 1978; Woodward, 2004; Oates, 2006; Boddy, 2008) have all pointed to the absence of women from boxing clubs, this presence-in-the-minority should not necessarily and automatically be understood as an essential continuity of the historically gendered ordering of boxing. Indeed, perhaps, boxing might be struggling to maintain (Trimbур, 2013) itself as a 'male preserve' (Sugden, 1996: 192) in late modernity.

### **3.3.3 Gender, Boxing and Late Modernity**

Women's amateur boxing was included in the Olympics for the first time in 2012. This 'was not only a controversial moment, but a decisive one' (Godoy-Pressland, 2015: 26) in that it signalled a restructuring of the social organisation of boxing counter to the tenets of the patriarchal values that have traditionally underpinned the sport (Kipnis and Caudwell 2015). Women are not absent from boxing gyms and the number of female boxers is increasing (Trimbur, 2013; Owton, 2015; Paradis, 2012). For Matthews (2016: 314) '[s]uch evidence could lead scholars and the public alike to suggest that the principles upon which the male preserve was originally proposed have largely been undermined'.

However, boxing is still 'dominated in number and symbolism by men' (Matthews, 2016: 328-329). This is reflected in contemporary scholarship from female ethnographers of boxing. Nash (2015: 14), for instance, notes that '[m]y presence in the club upset the embodied gender politics that undergirded the club'. Jump (2017) conducted ethnographic research in an all-male boxing environment. A woman being in a boxing club was 'confusing' (Jump, 2017: 19) for male boxers. Similarly, Paradis (2012: 95) notes that she was perceived by male participants as a threat to 'boxing as a male preserve' for 'contradicting' understandings of 'the gender game' by being a woman in a boxing environment. Boxing may not be solely undertaken by men, and women in increasing numbers participate in the sport, yet, crudely put, the arrangement described in the previous section remains figurative.

The continued existence of boxing as male preserve has been theorised in the following way: social life beyond the boxing gym is understood to no longer be gendered under the condition of individualisation. Matthews (2016: 318) notes that boxing clubs 'can offer the promise of stability to people living within the fluidity, uncertainty, and psychic insecurity of late modern social worlds where notions about gender, in particular, are undergoing rapid change'. Boxing, with its public, hypermasculine image therefore becomes attractive to men, and boxing is therefore fortified as a bastion of (otherwise now historical) masculinity. In the introduction to her tome on boxing and masculinity, Woodward (2007: 11) similarly notes that:

'this is an historical moment when there seems to be greater uncertainty about identity than at some points in the past. For

example, Anthony Giddens' work on the crisis in identity in late modern society foregrounds the insecurities of personal as well as collective identities... and Zygmunt Bauman has written about the profound anxiety that typifies the decision making and life projects of men and women in western societies... As Bauman has argued, the new social relationships of late capitalist society have given rise to the desire to return to a familiar and restricted world'.

Whilst boxing clearly is a domain dominated by men, the above understanding is arguably problematic. Just as Nash (2015: 13) notes the gender 'problem' with 'boxing could not be solved by merely increasing the visibility of women in the sport or gaining access to opportunities as per a liberal feminist view', so too does this notion apply to other aspects of social life. There may have been a re-organisation of the population to the extent that the public sphere does not straightforwardly exclude women, but this does not entail that gender is eroded in the process (Adkins, 2003). In this respect, Mulinari and Sandell (2009: 503) note that:

'In the very same moment when feminist theorizing is grappling with how to theoretically and analytically incorporate the insights that both social change and stability are deeply, but varyingly, gendered... Beck and Giddens argue that divisions of gender and class are crumbling, becoming erased and obsolete'.

That is, unlike the understanding of social life held by Woodward and Matthews via engagement with Bauman and Giddens, others have argued that social life beyond the gym is still gendered. Whereas Matthews (2014: 102) notes that: 'Late-modern movements toward gender equality have challenged the dominant forms of masculinity that once prevailed... Changes in the institutional organization of politics, education, the work place, governance, religion, media, and the family, it is argued, have eroded assumptions about the legitimacy of the traditional patriarchal order'. So too, however, has it been argued that these institutions remain dominated by men. As Pateman (2015: 2) notes: men occupy most 'authoritative positions in politics, the economy, higher education, the judiciary, and the military. Women earn less than men, and sexual harassment is still a feature of workplaces; they undertake most of the housework and childcare'. In other words, whilst boxing is clearly ordered by gender in late modernity,

there are conflicting understandings of the gendered order of the boxing gym as it relates to wider social life.

In summary, Matthews and Woodward understand boxing as an 'enclave' (Matthews, 2016: 318) of modern, traditional masculinity offering men a place in a world that is otherwise liquid. In contrast to this, Channon (2013), as discussed in the previous section, understands that it is contemporary social life in general that is rigidly gendered and that combat sports might be an apt site for challenging gender binaries considering their strongly gendered history. Similar has been argued by Trimbur (2013): through participation female boxers aim to craft identities irresolute in comparison to the gender binary of the world beyond the gym, and through women being present at the gym the association between boxing and men is not as easily maintained as it once was, though this association still endures. Given that white-collar boxing is a recently emergent version of the sport, notionally in the UK context open to male and female participation, its empirical examination can contribute further to this debate.

Whilst present at Trimbur's (2013) research site as amateur and professional boxers, women are excluded from the category of white-collar boxer. This is different to the British context: men and women participate in white-collar boxing, meaning that Trimbur's account is of limited use. Owton's (2015) autoethnographic boxing research can, however, be cautiously drawn on here. Owton does not state that it is white-collar boxing in which she participated, though between the description of training (a beginners' boxing course, culminating in a boxing match) and a De Montfort University research showcase article (DMU, 2014), it is reasonable to assume that it is the case.

Owton (2015: 234) was one of 'the only two women fighting' at the event, which suggests that white-collar boxing, whilst not *de facto* exclusionary to women, is in no way undertaken by men and women in equal numbers. Owton (2015: 222) notes that participation in boxing caused her 'to forget my 'old life' and 'my old self' and become someone new: I continue to put my 'new me' to 'numerous tests of experience''. Owton does not integrate her research into a theoretical account of identity, but the above could be read as to suggest that identity has become an active project (Bauman, 2004). Owton (2015: 235) also notes, however, that 'boxing the way into a self-reinvention' entails slow and 'painful transformation', which resonates with the account of boxing as a career, explored in 3.2.3. Perhaps, then, a

short course in white-collar boxing cannot instantaneously facilitate the development of identity as boxer through consumption. Equally, such short courses, and therefore the possibility of undertaking such painful transformations were, until recently, non-existent. Blackshaw (2013: 171) notes that 'Living a liquid modern life, it would seem, means that the habitus into which we are born has less constraining influence on our lives than would have been the case even twenty or thirty years ago', and arguably white-collar boxing, being a late-modern phenomenon, does allow for participation in the sport less-constrained by gender than boxing has been historically. Clearly, white-collar boxing presents a novel site for the analysis of gendered identity in late modernity.

### **3.4 Boxing and Race**

Carrington (2010: 1-2) notes that the 'black athlete was created on 26 December 1908 in a boxing ring in Sydney, Australia' when Jack Johnson the 'son of slave-born parents' became heavyweight champion of the world beating 'white Canadian boxer Tommy Burns'. Elsewhere, and drawing upon Fanon, Carrington (2002: 19) notes that: 'the black male was the repository of white fears, fantasies and desires, and of these constructions, there was one figure above all others that held a central place within the colonial imaginary': the black athlete. Indeed, Fanon (1952/1986: 128) specifically cites 'boxer' in this respect. Whilst it is rarely reported that boxing contexts purportedly operate on a basis that is 'blind' in these terms (Dortants and Knoppers, 2016), boxing is overall well known for being a site for the (re)production of race (Woodward, 2007; Rhodes, 2011). As discussed above, in the USA, white-collar boxing is premised on and produces 'anti-black racism' (Trimbur, 2013: 57). If and how race informs practice in this version of the sport beyond the USA is, however, unknown. This section therefore discusses boxing and race in Britain in broad terms, to serve as a guide for the empirical dimension of this thesis.

Woodward (2007: 24) notes that '[b]oxing in the US has at times been more emphatically marked by 'race' and racialization, as well as the ethnicization that has characterized boxing in Britain at particular points'. The meaning of this statement is that boxers in the USA are mostly black, African-American men, whereas this is not the case in Britain. This is not to say that matters of 'race' are absent in British boxing, indeed 'black boxers were prohibited



from fighting for British titles until 1948' (Carrington, 2002: 13), essentially an arrangement established post-Jack Johnson. There continues to be racism in British boxing (Burdsey, 2007). Unlike the USA, however, there is a 'continuing prevalence of White boxing champions in the United Kingdom, due in large part to the different racial demography of the class structure' (Rhodes, 2011: 355).

Noting this is key, in that it indicates economy as productive of race, both inside and outside of boxing. In this respect, Sugden notes:

It may be that black men make better boxers than whites. It is much more likely that the social position of blacks relative to whites in the United States and corresponding societies helps to determine their over-representation in professional boxing. Boxing was and continues to be the product of urban poverty... The ghetto is the nursery of professional boxing and so long as blacks continue to be over-represented in the ranks of the urban poor so too will they feature predominately in the ratings of *Ring Magazine* (Sugden, 1996: 40).

To this extent race *per se* is not explanatory in terms of boxing participation. It has been variously noted that migration, and the class positions which migrants come to occupy creates the conditions for racialisation and boxing (Weinberg and Arond, 1971; Woodward, 2014). As Dee (2012: 363) notes: 'Between the late 1890s and early 1950s, the sport was dominated by Jews of Russian and Eastern European origin – Jews whose parents or grandparents had fled to Britain during mass migrations between 1880 and 1914 to avoid pogroms and economic hardship'. Weinberg and Arond (1971: 287) more generally note that '[t]he ring has been described as the refuge of the under-privileged' and that migrant groups in economically under-privileged social space have populated boxing.

Woodward (2011: 495) notes that '[b]oxing occupies the relational space between flesh, conflict and social forces of economic deprivation, racism and the insecurities of migration and mobility that become concentrated on a particular version of masculinity'. Favell (2008: 702) noted in 2008 that 'a new East-West migration system is being established' within Europe. Woodward's research, however, does not discuss the contemporary migration between East and West Europe in the above terms. Matthews's (2011) doctoral thesis, however, an ethnography of a boxing and

weightlifting gym in the Midlands does contain brief reference to Eastern European migrant boxers. One of Matthews's English participants noted:

'Them Polish lads don't know how to spar, it's like they just don't give a shit, every [sparring] session is a world championship [fight]. So if that's the only language they know you got to talk to 'em like that. That's why I sent him in there with him. That calmed him down a bit' (Matthews, 2011: 167)

Sparring is essentially full-contact training in the gym, though with power attenuated. The aim of sparring, at least notionally, is not domination, but practice (see Chapter 8). For Matthews's English participant, a Polish boxer treated sparring as a world title fight, where the aim is domination. As a result, another boxer was sent into the ring to beat up the Polish boxer. Whilst this is but one small detail in Matthews's thesis, understood in relation to the above, it suggests that contemporary migration patterns inform practice in the boxing club. Fox *et al.* (2015:729) note that 'East European migrants in the UK have been victims of discrimination', and they continue to note that the whiteness of Eastern European migrants is 'contested' (Fox *et al.* 2015: 739). As Gilroy (2005: 111-112) notes '[t]he knot of ideas around sport demonstrates that we cannot sanction the luxury of believing that "race," nation, and ethnicity will be readily or easily disentangled from each other'. Rattansi and Westwood (1994) and Brubaker (2009) have noted similar. Whether this pattern of migration informs practice in white-collar boxing, and what this means in terms of identity in terms of racialisation will be explored in this thesis (particularly Chapter 7).

At this juncture, it should be noted that Bauman does not address race in his scholarship. Criticism, particularly from Rattansi (2017a, 2017b), is currently emerging in this respect, not only in terms of Bauman's liquid modern phase, but also in relation to his diagnosis of The Holocaust (Bauman, 1989). This thesis is only concerned with Bauman's liquid phase, in the hope that through engagement with this theory that white-collar boxing – which as the following chapters will explain further is a late modern practice *par excellence* – can be better understood, though this should be noted as a limitation of his scholarship. If understood to include race, identities derived from solid modern conditions of existence surely feature in the (would be 'liquid') modern world.

As the above suggests, race should not be understood as a synonym for 'black', and it is not only those constructed as 'black' who are racialised. The condition of 'being white' is not natural but subject to negotiation and contestation (Ignatiev, 1995). This is pertinent to boxing research (Cooley, 2010). Rhodes (2011: 351) notes, 'non-white' fighters tend to be 'scrutinized', whereas 'the white prizefighter' is left 'underexplored'. This thesis is not concerned with prizefighters. Rather it is concerned with white-collar boxers. In Trimbur's research context, white-collar boxers are exclusively white, and in this context, this can be understood as a signifier of class. As Chapters 1 and 2 discussed, white-collar boxing in the UK may not be what it seems, and Trimbur's analysis of whiteness should not be treated as a sufficient proxy for all white-collar boxing contexts. How whiteness figures in other boxing contexts is therefore pertinent to address.

Rhodes (2011: 360) identifies the figure of 'The White "working-class" or "blue-collar" boxing hero': 'so defined through their representation as an idealized embodiment of "respectable" classed, gendered, and racialized dispositions'. Rhodes draws upon professional boxers Ricky Hatton, Mickey Ward and Kelly Pavlik to analyse this narrative in the British and USA contexts respectively. It is not only through 'real' (Woodward, 2014: 118) boxers, however, that 'heroic legend' (Woodward, 2011: 489) narratives of white working-class boxers are reproduced. There are various boxing films through which this narrative is reproduced, the best known being *Rocky* (Woodward, 2007).

The *Rocky* series tells the story of an 'unprivileged white male who came... from the decaying streets of post-industrial Philadelphia' (Kusz, 2011: 132) 'who just would not quit and thereby became an international idol' (Holmlund, 2014: 7). Boxing films 'are always about so much more' than boxing (Woodward, 2011: 494); as Moores (1993: 67) notes 'Rocky is 'fighting' in more senses than one'. For Walkerdine (1986: 182) 'Rocky's struggle' is 'to become bourgeois'. For Kusz (2011: 132) Rocky's fight is to become white, as opposed to 'white ethnic' – Rocky being Italian-American. Between these accounts it can be noted with Woodward (2007: 133) that through the *Rocky* saga '[Sylvester] Stallone presents the viewer with a convincing narrative of white working-class advancement' through a 'rags-to-riches' storyline.

Whilst Balboa is a fictional boxer played by Sylvester Stallone, he is supposedly based on Chuck Wepner (Keller and Ward, 2014), who is most

famous for going all-but the distance with Muhammad Ali. Rocky's opponent in the first two Rocky films – Apollo Creed – 'clearly referenc[es] Muhammad Ali' (Keller and Ward, 2014: 178). Muhammad Ali, along with Jack Johnson, is cited as a key figure in shattering 'the myth of white superiority' (Naylor, 2003: 2) in and beyond boxing. Rocky as a cinematic fiction, however, is a re-instatement of that myth. For instance, 'Rocky III pits its hero against an animalistic black opponent' (Bauer, 2011: 280), Clubber Lang (played by Lawrence Tureaud, better known as Mr T). Bauer (2011: 286) continues: 'the begrudging, angry black fighter is generally punished for his hubris by being defeated by The Great White Hope'. Indeed, in Rocky V Balboa is explicitly referred to in this way. As discussed earlier in this chapter this term was brought into being as a direct result of colonialism. Rocky is therefore not entirely fictive, but based upon real boxers, and drawing upon and reproducing narratives of respectable white-working class masculinity in distinction to 'less respectable' identities. The attraction of watching the Rocky films (Walkerdine, 1997) and playing boxing computer games (Walkerdine, 2007; Baerg, 2007), may be that they allow for the occupation of the identity of Rocky Balboa through consumption.

Beyond this, however, Walkerdine (Walkerdine and Squire, 2010: 414) notes that reality television 'shows actively mobilize the voting power of the audience... We are no longer in the situation of simply watching Rocky, but are in the position to influence who can BE Rocky'. Beyond having the voting power to elevate reality television participants to Rocky status, it might however be that white-collar boxing allows for active participation in a 'story of honour' (Woodward, 2011: 494), not through spectating, but by directly participating in a fantasy brought to life. This has direct implications for how identity should be understood in white-collar boxing. Whereas for Wacquant (2004: 143) an understanding of 'anti-immediate-gratification' is a requirement to construct an identity through boxing, there is seemingly an immediate gratification being offered through white-collar boxing. For Bauman (2003: 23) 'delay of gratification' is now 'out of fashion'. In the 'liquid modern society of consumerist markets and individual consumers', 'dreamland' is made 'readily available' 'making further efforts redundant' (Bauman, 2017: 144-148). Indeed, white-collar boxing purports to offer transit from beginner to winner, from zero to hero, *from rookie to Rocky*, in just eight weeks. This eight-week format is unaddressed in the literature: further research is necessary.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Chapter 2 established that white-collar boxing is a form of the sport particular to late modernity. It was also established that there is a limited body of knowledge relating to the sport, and none relating to its conduct anywhere other than the USA. The first research question is therefore what is *white-collar boxing*? Given this unusual circumstance, there is little literature directly related to white-collar boxing to serve as a provisional guide to further research. However, from Trimbur's study it can be stated that white-collar boxing is a late modern practice, emergent with the decline of industrialism, and through which identities are consumed along the intersection of class, race and gender.

This chapter assessed literature to guide the empirical dimension of this study. This review has demonstrated that boxing practices have been informed by social class, gender and race. Given the above, the second research question this thesis seeks to address is: *how do social divisions co-ordinate practice in white-collar boxing*? As with the first research question – *what is white-collar boxing*? – this second research question is of an exploratory manner. Given that across time and space, as it has been suggested throughout this chapter, boxing participation has been differently organised according to social divisions.

Throughout this chapter, at various junctures, it has been identified that through analysing white-collar boxing in these terms a contribution can be made to 'grand' social theory, particularly on the pronounced liquidity of social life and the implications this has for understanding how social divisions co-ordinate conduct. The final research question is therefore: *What can white-collar boxing contribute to the understanding of the construction of identity in late modernity*? The following chapter addresses the methodology through which these questions will be addressed.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapters 2 and 3 culminated in the generation of three research questions. This chapter addresses how these research questions will be answered. To recapitulate, these questions are:

1. What is white-collar boxing?
2. How do social divisions co-ordinate practice in white-collar boxing?
3. What can white-collar boxing contribute to the understanding of the construction of identity in late modernity?

This chapter overviews the philosophical foundations for this research, which in summary are a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. Verstehen is assessed, and in line with constructionist ontology, is coupled with the understanding that meaningful action is situated in a context beyond the willing of any individual, and is socially produced. From this, semi-structured, biographical interviews and participant observation are identified as appropriate methods, which, taken together, can be understood as an ethnographic approach. The practical application of method is discussed in terms of data collection, and analysis procedure is debated and defined. Sampling is discussed: overall, opportunity sampling was used, though accompanied with purposive sampling to better account for all social groups present. Finally, research ethics are discussed: as the practice under analysis is a form of fighting much of this discussion focuses on potentiality for physical harm, though more commonplace or standard ethical issues are addressed too.

Much of this research was undertaken at a Boxing Club in the Midlands (given the pseudonym Shadcote). Further, secondary research sites, including public venues for weigh-ins and fight nights, were attended periodically throughout fieldwork. This chapter reflects research undertaken at Shadcote, which formed the core of fieldwork. Weigh-in and fight night fieldwork visits are addressed further in Chapters 8 and 9.

## **4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings**

The philosophy of social science is a voluminous arena (Jarvie, 2011). Any discussion within this thesis is therefore bound to be limited. Here philosophising is an instrumental task, undertaken to guide empirical enquiry (Jenkins, 2002). The philosophy of social science can be dissected into two strands of enquiry, ontology and epistemology. These two fields of study form the basis of the following discussion, to establish how this research should be conducted.

### **4.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

Ontology means the theory or study of existence (Hollis, 1994); the study of the nature of objects assumed to exist and the characteristics through which it can be claimed they can be known. It is an area of academic enquiry that transcends disciplines (Guarino *et al.*, 2009). In the context of sociology and social research, ontological discussion usually pertains to if and how social reality can be understood to exist (Benton and Craib, 2011), and particularly how social reality differs from nature (Hollis, 1994), to establish appropriate means of enquiry. There are two main ontological positions in social science – objectivism and constructionism. In brief, the former posits that social reality is external to and independent of social actors, whereas the latter posits the opposite (Delanty and Strydom, 2003).

Benton and Craib (2011: 233) note that epistemology is 'the philosophical enquiry into the nature and scope of human knowledge, concerned with distinguishing knowledge from belief, prejudice and so on. It is characteristically concerned with developing criteria by which to distinguish genuine knowledge from mere belief'. There are two main epistemological positions in social science which correspond with the above ontologies, positivism and interpretivism, and these positions differ in terms of what qualifies as knowledge. Positivism is an orientation positing that all that can be known is that which can be derived from direct sensory perception (Delanty and Strydom, 2003). Interpretivism on the other hand accepts that social reality is constructed through interaction and that analysis of meaning – which is not, as such, directly observable – should form the basis of knowledge about social reality (Benton and Craib, 2011). There are other epistemological positions in social science (e.g. Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend,

1975), though the epistemological discussion here is between positivism and interpretivism.

Ontology and epistemology overlap (Hughes and Sharrock, 2007). For instance, positivism is an epistemological position (Steinmetz, 2005), though it presupposes that there is an external objective reality simply awaiting our observation (Popper, 1935/2002; Hollis, 1994), in other words objectivism. Similarly, constructionist ontology is a presupposition of interpretivism (Bryman, 2004). Epistemology and ontology are therefore discussed concurrently below, and via this discussion a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology will be adopted for this research.

#### **4.2.2 Objectivism and Constructionism**

Objectivism positions the social world as external to and independent of subjects *i.e.* it posits what is often referred to as a subject-object divide or dualism. This approach mirrors the ontology presupposed in many natural sciences (Benton and Craib, 2011); indeed, the position supposes that social reality is of the same order as and embedded within nature (Ross, 2011). Constructionism on the other hand understands the social world as qualitatively different from the natural world because the existence of the former is dependent upon the existence of human beings (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), whereas the latter is not. Were humanity to end the earth would continue to orbit around the sun, there would still be weather, plants would continue to grow (albeit these phenomena would no longer be understood as planetary orbit, weather or plant growth) whereas the economy, religion, education, sport and all other social institutions would cease to exist. In other words – and ‘there can be little doubt about this’ (Hindriks, 2011: 137) – social reality is socially constructed, that is, ontologically dependent on human action.

From the above, this research rejects objectivism as an ontological position and accepts constructionism. Given that positivism as an epistemology presupposes objectivism as an ontology (Bryman, 2004), and that objectivism is ill-fitted to social reality, it can also be stated here that positivist epistemology is rejected for this thesis. Berger and Luckmann (1967) are primary proponents of social constructionism, and their work will now be discussed.



#### 4.2.2.1 Constructionism

All page numbers presented in this section, unless otherwise stated, refer to Berger and Luckmann (1967). A basic expression of social constructionism is that 'social order is a human product, or, more precisely, an ongoing human production. It is produced by man [*sic*] in the course of his ongoing externalization' (69-70). Externalization entails the 'projection of subjective meanings into reality' (122): 'As man externalizes himself, he constructs the world into which he externalizes himself. In the process of externalization, he projects his own meanings into reality' (122). Social reality is therefore 'built up by activity that expresses subjective meaning' (28).

Externalization by the individual, however, cannot be understood as productive of social reality. For Berger and Luckmann, social reality is produced by 'man in the course of his ongoing externalization'. This statement could be better phrased as: social reality is produced by humans in the course of their ongoing externalization. Whilst this is preferable as it inserts the whole gamut of humanity into this theory, it is also preferable in that it makes it more obvious that by man, the scholars mean humans plural, which more readily makes apparent the *social* construction of reality as an interactive process. Humans '*together* produce a human environment' (69) through interaction. Subjectivity is mediated with and between others, and interaction produces a 'fabric of meanings without which no society could exist' (27). Social reality, is therefore constituted of intersubjective meaning: 'The reality of everyday life further presents itself to me as an intersubjective world' (37).

Differing slightly from the previous basic expression of social constructionism (that society is an ongoing human production), Berger and Luckmann also note: '*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*' (78, emphasis in original). Whereas the first statement does not implicate the individual as socially produced, this second statement does. Whilst Berger and Luckmann argue that intersubjectively upheld meaning is the ontological fabric of the social, this fabric is not only woven from the subjectivities of those living in the here-and-now, but the intersubjective meanings of actors in the past externalized and 'objectivated' (154). Individuals capable of comprehending and producing meaning are 'born into an objective social structure' (151) 'independent of our own volition' (13) that cannot be wished away. This is 'internalized' by actors, meaning that 'the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness

in the course of socialization' (78-79). As Appelrouth and Edles (2008: 560) note, paraphrasing Berger and Luckmann: 'it is only by using the pre-existing, intersubjective elements of language and culture that individuals are able to act at all'.

Whilst interaction forms much of the basis of Berger and Luckmann's discussion, it has been argued that they overlook the body as a meaningful component of interaction (Turner, 1992). Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) argue that Berger and Luckmann unduly disregard the body, this being a product of the general 'excision of the body from Western thought' (Bennett and Castiglioni, 2004: 250). Such criticism is not entirely undue. Berger and Luckmann do implicate the body in their theory, for instance poignantly noting that '[s]ociety... determines the manner in which the organism [the body] is used in activity; expressivity, gait and gesture are socially structured' (201-202). However, they continue to note that '[t]he possibility of a sociology of the body that this raises need not concern us' (202). The body as both a vessel for and producer of social reality is therefore relatively unaddressed. The indistinctiveness of the subject and object is recognised by Berger and Luckmann – the symbiotic process of production of the social and the individual, and the sediment of each found in the other is not neglected – though the body deserves further attention.

Since *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), the sociology of the body has proliferated. Whilst Berger and Luckmann arguably foreground such theory (Reay, 2010), it is useful to inject here a firmer understanding of bodies as meaningful in discussion of ontology (Dreher, 2016). Habitus refers to 'the social constitution of the agent' (Wacquant, 2014b: 6) in bodily terms, and vice versa (Bourdieu, 1977a). As Dreher (2016: 63) notes: 'Bourdieu's solution for overcoming the gap between objectivism and subjectivism can be found in the concept of habitus, which is seen as a disposition based on a specific stock of knowledge which structures our experience and action'. To note, this gap is not actually unresolved by Berger and Luckmann, though explicitly injecting habitus into this theoretical framework better accounts for embodiment in the social construction of reality than the original theoretical elaboration.

Another criticism of Berger and Luckmann, addressed via the inclusion of Bourdieu in this framework, is that the scholars underemphasize power relations in the social construction of reality. Indeed, Bourdieu has been read (Dreher, 2016) as implying that Berger and Luckmann are power-blind.

Again, as per the criticism above previously addressed on the body, the criticism is not entirely undue, but is perhaps overstated. Berger and Luckmann do address power: 'power in society includes the power to determine decisive socialization processes and, therefore, the power to produce reality' (137). Power is left somewhat abstract in their account, however: gender, class and race, and therefore the production of gendered, classed and racialized social reality are unaddressed. Bourdieu and Berger and Luckmann overall can be situated in the same 'movement in social theory' (Vandenburgh, 1999: 48) which seeks to overcome the dualism of object and subject, as has been highlighted above concerning the body. Overt recognition of the social, economic and cultural forms of power, discussed by Bourdieu injected into this ontological framework, therefore strengthens the account. Doing so is apt given that this research seeks to elucidate what white-collar boxing is, and if and how it is sustained according to social divisions.

#### **4.2.2.2 Interpretivism**

Social reality is socially produced through meaningful interaction, structurally informed through the internalisation of the social by actors, given and inherited from the past. Interpretivism recognises that the object of enquiry in social science is ontologically distinct from that of natural science; that social reality is socially constructed and therefore dependent on meaningful human action (Gray, 2017). Wishing to produce scientific accounts of social reality therefore requires an analysis of meaning. As such this research adopts an interpretivist epistemological position.

Key to interpretivism is *verstehen*, a German term for which there is no direct English equivalent (Hammersley, 1992). Parsons notes that it is inadvisable to attempt to translate *verstehen* into a single English term, though continuing that 'understanding' (Parsons in Weber, 1968: 57 n2) is a common translation. For Berger (1963: 146) *verstehen* is 'the technical term used to denote... sociological understanding', involving 'the interpretation of meanings present in society'. How actors understand white-collar boxing, and meaningfully act based on that understanding, sustains the phenomenon. Answering the research questions posed for this thesis therefore requires an interpretive understanding. It is with Berger's definition of *verstehen* which this thesis works. It aligns with the

constructionist ontology outlined above, and in doing so does not revert to Weberian individualism – Weber being an original proponent of *verstehende* sociology.

Conducting interpretivist research here means examining the taken-for-granted as socially contingent and ultimately upheld through intersubjective meaning, though presented as otherwise. That is, revealing the seemingly objective as constructed and ascertaining how these conditions are brought into being, interpreting the social action through which such constructed reality is established. It also entails situating meaningful action of those present in relation to the wider social schema. Empirical methods capable of yielding data towards the construction of such an account will now be discerned.

#### **4.2.2.3 Qualitative Research**

The tenets of the philosophical position above essentially recommend qualitative over quantitative research methods (Gray, 2017), the latter being unfit to grasp meaning. Winch explains this well:

a man who understands Chinese is not a man who has a firm grasp of the statistical probabilities for the occurrence of the various words in the Chinese language. Indeed, he could have that without knowing that he was dealing with a language at all; and anyway, the knowledge that he was dealing with a language itself is not something that could be formulated statistically. 'Understanding', in situations like this, is grasping the point or meaning of what is being done or said (Winch, 1990: 115).

Another way of expressing the research question *what is white-collar boxing?* is *what are the qualities of white-collar boxing?* Answering this question – in a similar way to the extract above – cannot readily be answered in quantitative terms. The answer, based upon the above, minimally must be that white-collar boxing is ontologically dependent on human activity, formed intersubjectively and existent through meaning. Probing the phenomenon therefore requires qualitative enquiry. As such, quantitative methods can be discounted as appropriate for this study, and this also serves as a justification for using qualitative methods.

Though this is a reductionist statement, and is addressed further in section 4.5, qualitative research is typically inductive, essentially entailing that data precede theory. A deductive approach on the other hand – typically that used in quantitative research – entails that a theoretical statement, or hypothesis, is examined via data collection and this statement may be falsified in light of such data and rejected (though data may suggest that the statement should not be rejected too). Crucially here, inductive research builds up to a theoretical understanding of phenomena via data collection and analysis. Given that there is only one existent sociological account of white-collar boxing based on a USA context (Trimbur, 2013) and that preliminary data analysis expressed in Chapter 2 suggests that white-collar boxing in the UK is effectively a different phenomenon, inductive research is necessary.

The intricacies of research practice undertaken in this project are addressed later in this chapter, though here in broad terms the methods employed to answer research questions for this study are now addressed: these are participant observation and interviews, which together can be understood as an ethnographic approach.

## **4.3 Research Methods and Data Collection**

### **4.3.1 Ethnography**

Broadly, ethnography – a Greek term – translates to depicting people, deriving etymologically from the terms *ethnos* and *graphein*. For some, ethnography and qualitative research are synonymous (Wolcott, 2016) in that there are no rigidly dictated rules for conducting ethnographic research (Fielding, 2001). Indeed, ethnography can be described as a ‘research style’ (Atkinson, 1990: 3). However, participant observation almost always figures in ethnographic research and it is from this technique that ethnography as a practice was born (Gobo and Marciniak, 2016). Interviews are also an often-used qualitative method (Bryman, 2004), as they allow researchers to explore how individuals make sense of social worlds. Wishing for *verstehende* understanding, interviews are a desired element of this research. Often, these are used as a standalone method for social research. Here, however, interviews are included as part of a wider research design. This research is concerned with social practice; interviews do not yield knowledge pertaining to practice *per se*, but of perceptions of practice in

response to specific questions. Participant observation is however a prime method used to yield data on social practice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3). Together, these methods can be understood as an ethnographic approach.

This research is concerned with producing a rich account of what white-collar boxing is, and how white-collar boxing is informed by social divisions. In other words, it is concerned with practice. Analysis of practice benefits greatly from 'being there' (Becker, 1966: 56), observing the phenomenon as it is engaged in by actors who make it meaningful, indeed sustain its existence, and from which meaning is derived for actors. Interviews, in addition to observation, are necessary here, to grasp such meaningful action from the point of view of those ontologically complicit with the phenomenon. Via attending to all of this, ethnography allows for the reconstruction of 'what is' (Gobo and Marciniak, 2016: 112), which aligns well with the aims of this research. Ethnographic approaches have been used recurrently by researchers concerned with similar questions applied to different forms of boxing (e.g. Wacquant, 2004; Sugden, 1996; Jump, 2017), from which this research takes heed. Boxing practice has been informed by embodied dispositions in relation to social space, which are subject to change through practice (Wacquant, 2004) and ethnography has previously been fruitful to this extent in being able to yield data on these processes. In other words, boxing research is well suited to this form of ethnography.

Ethnographic research was conducted at Shadcote Boxing Club between December 2014 and June 2015. Fieldwork was undertaken daily during this time, and fieldwork visits reflect the schedule of the boxing club (Chapter 5). In brief, this entailed researching at the boxing club in the late afternoon and early evening when the majority of training was undertaken at the club. Typically, three hours per day were spent at the club. Approximately 100 fieldwork diary entries were made, and 32 interviews undertaken.

#### **4.3.2 Participant Observer/Observing Participant**

Various scholars have noted the different manner in which ethnographic research can be conducted with regards to level of participation in the field (Gold, 1958; Kawulich, 2005) ranging from 'complete participant' to 'complete observer' with intermediate positions 'observer as participant' and 'participant as observer' (Kawulich, 2005: 6). Though this is by no means

always the case (e.g. Woodward, 2004; Sugden, 1996; Jump, 2017), in much boxing and other comparable combat sport research (e.g. Wacquant, 2004; Matthews, 2015; Abramson and Modzelewski, 2011; Paradis, 2012), a fully participatory approach is often adopted, in which the body is used as a tool for enquiry, and a means of experiencing the object of analysis. However, full participation in terms of the usual physical contact with others involved in boxing was not undertaken during this research. This is explored further in the subsection of this chapter: *Physical Harm*.

Other than this restriction, however, during fieldwork, multiple positions for observation were adopted, some which were closer to pure observation, and some closer to complete participant. This changed daily, dependent on the activities being undertaken at the club that day. For example, on Tuesdays at Shadcote sparring sessions are held. They were attended by fewer white-collar boxers (typically 10-20), and it was therefore relatively easy to sit, uninterrupted and observe sparring. During white-collar boxing classes, however, the boxing club was far busier to the extent that finding a place from which to observe without presenting an obstacle to those training was difficult. Given that I did not make notes in the field at the boxing club, data collection did not differ between these positions. However, different positions on the participant-observer continuum were occupied during the various fight nights attended during research, which did have implications on data collection (see Chapter 9).

#### **4.3.3 Ethnographic Field Notes**

The appropriate approach to taking field notes is context-dependent (Hammersley, 1995). At the boxing club writing field notes was impractical: much of my time in the field I was wearing boxing gloves, meaning that holding a pen was impossible. Moreover, notetaking in the field is not always socially appropriate (Jenkins, 2011). Notepads and pens are not commonplace in boxing clubs, and, therefore, unlike some other research contexts where writing materials usually figure (e.g. offices) there was no option of 'blending in' (Pole and Hillyard, 2016) whilst taking field notes. Like Jenkins (2011: 33) therefore 'I recorded whatever I was interested in as soon as I could after the event'; during training I made 'mental notes' (Emerson *et al.*, 2001; Lofland and Lofland, 1995), to be written up post-fieldwork.

Writing notes post-training was tiring. The majority of activity at the club takes place in the evening, between 6pm and 10pm, and had I not been researching the club, my normal routine would have been to go home, shower, eat and then sleep. However, this pattern was altered on commencement of this research. Upon getting home after training-as-research, I wrote field notes prior to undertaking my normal routine. This approach was impractical, detrimental to the research process and arguably my health, as suggested by the following diary extracts:

'It is difficult to take notes. I'm tired. V hard session'. (8<sup>th</sup> January, field notes).

'It is now 11.30 pm, I've not had a shower and I've just finished writing field notes'. (14<sup>th</sup> January, field notes).

The above approach could be understood as developing mental notes into 'full fieldnotes' (Emerson *et al.*, 2001: 356). However, as has been variously noted (Ottenberg, 1990; Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Emerson *et al.* 2001), there is often an intermediary measure employed in the writing of fieldnotes between the mental and the full varieties in the form of 'jotted notes' *i.e.* 'writing key words and phrases' (Emerson *et al.*, 2001: 356) prior to writing notes in full. An approach I therefore later adopted was to make skeletal notes as soon as possible post-training, jotting down information pertaining to what happened at the boxing club that evening, and then the next day fleshing them out. As Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 95) note: 'a single word' can be 'enough to "trip off" a string of images that afford substantial reconstruction of the observed scene'. This approach allowed for longer, richer descriptive pieces to be produced. This is not to say that field notes were necessarily always later developed to the point of being full prose *i.e.* conjunctions and prepositions may be missing and sentences may be incomplete. In the following chapters field notes are often adapted to read as prose through re-including such words, and by expanding upon the original note.

#### **4.3.4 Interviews**

Thirty-two formal interviews were conducted for this research lasting between approximately 120 and 20 minutes. As is common practice (Edwards and Holland, 2013), interviews were conducted in quiet, public



locations: notably a pub near to the boxing club, but also a café, and the boxing club itself outside of training times. Overarching consent was given in writing from the owner of the boxing club to conduct this research, and separate written consent was gained from interview participants.

Interviews were semi-structured (Bryman, 2004). A schedule was constructed to which overall the interview was conducted, though questions contained within the schedule were open-ended, allowing for data to be yielded 'on how [the interviewee] frames and understands issues and events — that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding [their own lives]' (Bryman, 2004: 321). As well as being semi-structured, the interview schedule was constructed with sensitivity to temporality thereby taking the form of biographical, life history interviews (Atkinson, 1998), discussed further below.

Interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone. In some interview-based research, researchers take notes during interviews (Edwards and Holland, 2013). However, I opted not to take notes, as I wanted to give participants my full attention. Post-interview, time was provided to reflect upon the experience of being interviewed, during which some participants indicated for instance nervousness (as is quite common in interview contexts) (Warren, 2001). This information was useful during the analysis process, providing insight into why perhaps some participants were more or less talkative than others, and why certain answers were framed in certain ways.

#### **4.3.4.1 Life History Interviews**

Life history interviews (Faraday and Plummer, 1979), otherwise known as life story (Atkinson, 1998) biographical (Lim, 2011) or narrative interviews (Sandelowski, 1991) are forms of interview undertaken with a sensitivity to time, allowing for participants to recount their understanding of their own being in the world with reference to past, experience of the present and anticipations for the future (Atkinson, 1998).

During the planning stages of this research it was evident the relationship between being and time was an important feature of analysis. Chapter 3 attests to this, in which it has been indicated that boxing should be understood as a 'career' (Becker, 1953) and that through long-term engagement in the sport, bodily orientation in the world and identity are subject to reformulation. White-collar boxing in this research context, can

be understood as to offer access to a condensed career of a professional boxer, offering participants the experience of a lifetime, from rookie to Rocky, in eight weeks (Chapter 5). As life history interviews allow for data to be produced regarding the human experience of 'time, order and change' (Sandelowski, 1991: 165) they were therefore understood to be an appropriate method through which to research white-collar boxing.

Life history interviews do not pertain to everything that has happened during the life course. There are many aspects of life history of which individuals are unaware (Becker and Geer, 1957) meaning this is necessarily the case. Moreover, narrating every remembered element and occurrence of a participant's life, would arguably require an interview that lasted, quite literally, a life-time. Life history interviews therefore selectively represent the past in terms meaningful to the subject. Whilst referred to as biographical or life history interviews, the approach adopted here did not intend to capture the minute details of every aspect of the lives of participants from birth up until point of interview. Rather, the interviews were designed to centre on the process through which participants became involved in white-collar boxing.

The interview schedule for white-collar boxers was demarcated into sections reflecting the way in which time is structured in this research context, as will be further detailed throughout the thesis. These are: life before undertaking white-collar boxing; decision to undertake white-collar boxing; entry to the boxing club; the experience of being at the boxing club; weigh-in and fight night as the two features which mark the end of this experience, and finally life after the eight-week white-collar boxing experience.

Regarding this structure, in the planning stages of this research the following was overlooked. Whilst social life is never absolutely inert (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Bourdieu, 2010) white-collar boxing entails a deliberately condensed and rapid process. Participants were at different points in the white-collar boxing process at the various points of being interviewed *e.g.* some participants had completed the eight-week course, some had only just started, some were midway and had therefore undertaken sparring, but not yet attended their weigh-in. This meant that data could not always be collected on certain experiences of white-collar boxing, participants not yet necessarily having experienced them. Questions were still asked relating to all aspects of white-collar boxing however, as this allowed for data to be

gathered pertaining to how participants perceived these experiences prior to undertaking them.

Interviews are a social interaction and are not devoid of power dynamics and performance. They are a face-to-face situation (Irvine *et al.*, 2013) requiring negotiation (Goffman, 1990). In terms of life history, 'socially desirable' (Grimm, 2010) narratives may therefore have been presented by participants. Even though participants often openly discussed difficult episodes of their lives, this was arguably done in managed terms. This can also be taken to apply to the institutional history of the boxing club derived from interviews, discussed further in Chapter 5. This institutional history presents one wherein amateur and professional boxing are rejected – though it may be that these rejections entail rejecting that which has rejected them, and this is not addressed in interviews from which the account is constructed.

My position at the club as researcher and club lad/staff member should be acknowledged here, in that in some contexts both amounted to powerful positions in the interview context. Rapport is important in interviews (Ryan and Dundon, 2008), and these positions did allow for a rapport of sorts to be developed. Ultimately being a member of the club meant that I knew some participants prior to this research. I was an 'insider' (Woodward, 2008) in this research setting, and arguably more of an insider than many participants due to my relatively high status at the club. In terms of social desirability, it may be that participants presented accounts through which they could maintain face (Goffman, 1990) in the boxing gym post-interview.

#### **4.3.5 Questionnaire**

As part of the interviews conducted, a short survey was included. This was not a full-blown, rigorously designed quantitative survey, and was not intended to yield data amenable to any form of quantitative analysis *prima facie* able to pronounce on causation. The design of this questionnaire drew heavily upon Atkinson's (2010) research design (*c.f.* Atkinson, 2010) through which social class is measured qualitatively via interviews in Bourdieusian terms, though with attention paid to how habitus can be understood in relation to social space via survey data collection. I found this prospect attractive during the initial research design stage, given that much qualitative research remains at the level of habitus without placing the

embodied subject in a wider scheme of social relations. Atkinson's questionnaire was modified, however, to include self-selectable (*i.e.* open questions) relating to demographic information (age, ethnicity, income, employment) to transcend class analysis.

I did not know all of the participants prior to this research, and their frequenting of the club often lasted only eight weeks, therefore collecting some basic demographic information on participants was appealing. Indeed, it was necessary, or so I decided in the planning stages to gain such data, to be able to assess whether the term 'white-collar' could be understood to accurately describe the social class and employment type of practitioners of white-collar boxing. In hindsight, though, this data is limited. It was included in an attempt to understand interview data better in relation to a wider social schema, to situate the embodied subject within social space (Atkinson, 2010; Bourdieu, 2010). However, being in the world cannot be reduced to such limited data. Dimensions of what was asked on the questionnaire were often addressed during the interview in greater detail. Data from this questionnaire are presented in Chapter 6, though beyond this are not heavily drawn upon.

#### **4.3.6 Ceasing Data Collection**

The question of what amounts to sufficient quantity of data in qualitative research is difficult to answer. Saturation is often touted as a useful solution to this problem. It refers to the notion that 'no significant new information or ideas emerge with additional data' (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 168) and is a benchmark by which many qualitative researchers operate as a guide for leaving the field (Mason, 2010). This research cannot claim to have become saturated for the following reason. Post-research, I remained at Shadcote and returned to my regular training routine. I continued to see interactions at the club, and found myself wondering whether such occurrences challenged theory I was then developing and have now developed. Having ceased research at this stage, I do not have notes pertaining to this, though it is sufficient to say that new ideas or information would surely have emerged. Taken to the extreme, this would always be the case: social life is not, after all, static. For this reason, I became subject to 'one more interview syndrome' (Back, 2007: 117), which can also be extended to the urge to ever commit to one more day in the field. As a

pragmatic solution, data collection was stopped at the six-month mark, which aligned with the end of one of the eight-week white-collar training camps. Practically, a manageable dataset had been achieved – my concern was that any larger and analysis within the timeframe would not have been possible. Epistemologically, I considered the data collected more than sufficient as to produce original knowledge in relation to the research questions.

## **4.4 Sampling**

### **4.4.1 Opportunity Sampling**

Overall, opportunistic, convenience-based sampling was used in this research regarding interviews. Opportunity sampling pertains to participants being selected for interview based on ease and willingness to do so (Bryman, 2004). Given the white-collar boxing format – an eight-week boxing beginners' programme, at the beginning of which between 80 and 120 potential participants congregate or gather at the boxing club – no other sampling method was overall feasible. In some respects, opportunity sampling was an easy approach to conducting this research. Indeed, on occasion, I was actively approached by a participant wishing to be involved, as the following field diary entry demonstrates:

'new white-collar approaches me and asks if I am the psychology guy. I politely correct him: I am the sociology guy, but essentially, yes, I am. He wants to be interviewed. I say I can't offer any counselling or therapeutic dimension in the interview, which I wanted to make clear, as he initially thought I was a psychologist. I find it interesting that he approached me. Rick had said about ten minutes before that the new white-collars weren't going to approach me and I need to be more proactive.'  
(field notes, 31<sup>st</sup> January).

Similarly, many participants were keen to be interviewed once asked, though did not actively offer. In other respects, opportunistically selecting participants proved difficult, because the attrition rate for white-collar boxing programmes is significant. Whereas there are typically between 80 and 120 people attending the eight-week training camp in week one, by week eight the number of people still participating is approximately 40. Data on reasons

for attrition are almost entirely lacking, however, as at the point of dropping out, white-collar boxers ceased contact with the club, and by extension, me. This is reflected upon further in Chapter 7.

#### **4.4.2 Purposive Sampling**

Whilst overall opportunistically selected, the sample for this study was at points purposefully selected for various reasons. Purposeful sampling (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015) is a common approach to sampling in qualitative social science (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). It relates to the practice of constructing a sample with certain criteria in mind, beyond selecting participants based on convenience (Coyne, 1997). As Palinkas *et al.* (2015: 534) note, such sampling entails selecting 'individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest'. This statement is pertinent for this context, as for the most part, purposive sampling was implemented due to the wish to ensure that the various social groups present at the boxing club, including those who were minorities, at least in the context of the gym, were present in the sample.

There was a minority of men, constructed by the English men at the club reductively as 'Eastern Europeans'. In basic terms, there was hostility between the English men (known at the club as lads) and the Eastern Europeans. Given that research question two relates to how social divisions order practice in white-collar boxing, it was of interest to explore this dynamic, and opportunistic sampling could not ensure that accounts relating to the experience of the East Europeans at the club were gained. Purposeful sampling efforts were therefore made to interview members of this group at the club. Overall there were six present at the club who could be understood to belong to this group. Efforts were made to conduct interviews with all of them, though this was not without various and unforeseeable difficulties, individual to each participant, summarised below.

Whilst overall there was no language barrier between the Eastern Europeans and others at the gym I was concerned that an interview with one participant would be unmanageable. He could speak enough English to get by – we had conversations about all manner of things, including my research – though I felt that a formal interview would be too challenging for us both, and that it may have been unethical given the relatively complex terminology included in the consent form and participant information sheet. In circumstances

wherein researcher and participant do not share a common language an interpreter is often employed in order to facilitate interviews and to translate information sheets (Murray and Wynne, 2001). However, as Edwards (1998: 197) notes 'this process is generally regarded as fraught with difficulties'. In this research context, white-collar boxing programmes operate on an eight-week timeframe, during which periods (unusually tiring) ethnographic data collection occurred daily, alongside negotiating, arranging and conducting interviews with other participants, and subsequently transcribing these interviews. Arranging for a translator/interpreter to translate the relevant documentation and then be available to work outside of usual hours was not feasible for a lone researcher bound by an unusually abrupt timeframe.

Other than this example, multiple interviews were arranged that did not come to fruition with participants from this group. For example, I walked to the bus stop from the gym one night with one potential participant. We had a great conversation about boxing, and I asked him if I could interview him formally. He readily agreed and we set a date to meet at the gym. On the arranged date, I arrived at the gym, but he did not. The walk we shared was the last time I ever saw him. I asked around for him at the club, and the response from some was that he had dropped out of the white-collar boxing programme having been in a street fight in which he broke his hands. The opportunity to interview this participant therefore immediately disappeared.

Similarly, I arranged to interview another participant from this group. He had a busy work life and finding a suitable date was difficult. Eventually, a date was set, but the day before the interview he had to leave the country abruptly due to unforeseen family circumstances. There was a comparable situation with another participant, who left the country at short notice during our ongoing dialogue regarding a feasible interview date. These examples may possibly be understood to relate to the many difficulties with which some transnational migrants have to contend (*e.g.* Hack-Polay, 2012).

For the reasons above, out of the six Eastern European men at the gym only one was interviewed. This interview provided a great deal of insight (Chapter 8). Further data pertaining to the racialized national division between the white, English majority at the club and the Eastern Europeans was gained via observation and interviews with other members of the gym. Overall, however, the limited data pertaining to the perspectives of this group of participants is a shortcoming of this research and knowledge produced in subsequent chapters is inevitably limited.

Given that boxing has been largely undertaken by men, and that at Shadcote there was a minority of women, I also considered it wise to purposefully seek to interview female participants. Five female white-collar boxers were interviewed out of the eight in total regularly present at the boxing club over the course of this research. White-collar boxing already impinging on free time available to be interviewed, one female white-collar boxer was approached, though ultimately a date could not be fixed to conduct an interview.

There was also a complex and sensitive situation in which two female and three male white-collar boxers were involved. Discretely put, if a love triangle involves three people being involved in what was originally a two-fold sexual relationship, then this scenario may be understood as a love pentagon. This dynamic was a source of turmoil at the club during this research, and whilst it would have undoubtedly been fruitful to gain data on this dynamic via interview, I did not want to jeopardise the research, participants' well-being, or exacerbate existing tensions at and beyond the club relating to this scenario, and therefore I chose not to interview any of the participants involved.

Overall, however, there was a dividend to the purposeful sampling approach relating to women at the club, and if anything, women are overrepresented in the interview sample. This allowed the production of an account of gendered habituses to be developed more amenable to women's experiences of white-collar boxing (Chapter 7).

## **4.5 Reflexivity and Data Analysis**

### **4.5.1 Reflexivity**

Whilst a basic expression of induction is that data precedes theory, a more nuanced understanding of induction is that the relationship between theory and data is that: theory precedes data, which precedes theory. In other words: observation is theory-dependent (Chalmers, 1999). That a literature review has informed the production of research questions provides initial evidence of this more complicated relationship between theory and data in inductive research: the research questions are the product of discussion of theory, which are the springboard for the data collection for this research. Beyond this, however, in general, theory is not only the domain of the social



scientist, but is a necessary requirement of social being (Chalmers, 1999; Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Social scientists necessarily collect data through a lens formed of being in the world as social actors, which makes problematic the prospect of neutrality or objectivity. This revised understanding of induction also therefore relates to the position of social scientist as a constituent part of the object of study and the implication that this has on perception. Subject and object are indistinct in social life and researchers are not excluded from this arrangement. Value-free sociology is a myth (Gouldner, 1962), and 'the view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986) patently becomes an impossibility.

Reflexivity therefore becomes highly important in the practice of social science. With Finlay and Gough (2003) it can be noted that:

[t]he etymological root of the word 'reflexive' means 'to bend back upon oneself'. In research terms this can be translated as thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and researched. Reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positionings and behaviour impact on the research process (Finlay and Gough, 2003: xi).

Not all of these categories for critical self-reflection can be addressed here, though at various junctures of this research the above is borne in mind. It is important to note that reflexivity cannot be understood as providing absolute solutions to epistemological problems (Pillow, 2003); the unrealised is unavailable to reflect upon. It is, however, an important concept to which consideration should be drawn. In brief, my relationship with boxing – borrowing from Wacquant – is one of passion, in terms of being one of simultaneous love and suffering. Perhaps suffering could even be replaced with hate sometimes in my context. Boxing gave me a life post-addiction, allowing for the construction of a positive sober identity. Yet at the same time the structural inequalities addressed within this thesis, within which I became situated upon undertaking the sport, jarred with my sociological sensibilities. Similarly, there were some with whom I got on well at the boxing club, and others with whom I did not. This all has direct implications for the production of knowledge. I found myself at points wishing to defend white-collar boxing, and defend actions that reproduce inequalities, whilst at other points wishing to write the most personal and obliterating account of the sport. Realising and reflecting upon this – in Finlay and Gough's terms

becoming 'self-aware' – allowed for better accounting of the knowledge produced via this research.

#### **4.5.2 Data Analysis**

As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 158) note '[t]here is no formula or recipe for analysis of ethnographic data'. Given the discussion above, analysis is not a discrete, isolated stage of research. At the point of data collection, there is analysis in that subject and object are indistinct, and therefore data are analytical constructions. However, like most qualitative research there was a designated analysis 'stage' to this research – wherein data collection had been completed, but formal writing had not yet commenced. Such data analysis undertaken here should broadly be understood as thematic analysis, in that data were systematically organised according to similarities (Silverman, 2013). The two methods of data collection – participant observation and interviews – produced data that were analysed slightly differently, though still both thematically.

In terms of interviews: post-interview I wrote notes on anything which I thought might be interesting or useful prior to transcription (Merrill and West, 2009). Interviews were transcribed *verbatim* as soon as possible after they were conducted (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Analysis was undertaken on a rudimentary level at this stage. During transcription, I had a separate Microsoft Word document open to synopsise the interview being transcribed and to make notes. These documents formed part of my field diary. I also annotated the interview transcript itself whilst transcribing, using the Comment function on Word. This was the first stage of coding for interviews, which did not occur for observational notes, given that there were no audio recordings relating to observational data. The process of transcription did not occur in fieldnotes, given that in the first instance fieldnotes were not audio recorded, meaning that analysis did not occur in exactly the same capacity as interviews. Equally, writing fieldnotes after visits allowed for analytical reflections to occur in a similar way (Wacquant, 2004) and beyond this difference, field diary entries were analysed in the same capacity as interviews as discussed above.

Following this transcripts and field notes were manually coded, allowing for depth understanding of data allowing for the meticulous construction of complex themes (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Given that interviews were

designed to answer the research questions produced via literature review, to an extent this process was relatively straightforward. Equally, themes also emerged from data which had not been anticipated. For instance, it was unanticipated that *did not know the meaning of the term white-collar*, would emerge as a theme (Chapter 6).

A final stage of analysis involves integration into existing theory and research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For instance, weigh-ins in white-collar boxing serve a rather unusual purpose, the visibly immediate activity that takes place at weigh-ins is in effect not actually occurring (Chapter 8). White-collar boxers stand on the scales, but their weight is not recorded. Rather, weigh-ins exist to provide white-collar boxers with the professional boxing experience. Understanding this practice fully requires situating it in relation to extant scholarship on boxing. In including this stage of analysis, it is hoped that a thoroughly sociological account of white-collar boxing is achieved, one that connects the micro and the macro (Mills, 2000).

#### **4.6 Ethics**

In general, ethics regard the study of morality, in other words good and bad (Williams, 1972) or right and wrong (Kara, 2015). Research ethics as a practical endeavour relates to how social enquiry should be conducted in a manner that is good *i.e.* not detrimental or harmful to actors involved, including the researcher (Bulmer, 1982). All research with human participants has ethical issues (Bryman, 2004). This research was approved by the University of Nottingham School of Sociology and Social Policy ethics committee in December 2014. Generally, this research followed ethical protocol in the following ways: data was held in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act and relevant ethical Guidelines (UoN, 2013; ESRC, 2012) entailing data being kept in a secure, locked cabinet and being password protected once digitalised. Participants were informed of the nature of the study via the provision of information sheets. A Lone Working Policy was constructed, in which it was agreed that public transport would be taken to and from the research site, and that I would be in regular contact with supervisors to ensure I was safe. These are all standard fieldwork safety procedures. Ethics is not however purely a procedural activity (Guillemin and Gillan, 2004), and curtailing harm should be attended to consciously throughout the research process (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002).

#### **4.6.1 Physical Harm**

In research concerned with combat sport participatory ethnography is often undertaken (Matthews, 2014; Littaye, 2016; Wacquant, 2015; Hogeveen, 2013), not least as it provides first-hand sensory experience of what the physical activity under analysis entails. Prior to beginning this research, knowing the benefits of participation pronounced by the scholars above, I did not want to preclude this option.

The very activity being researched however meant that there was a potential risk of physical harm to both researcher and participants. This has not been considered in the scholarly literature on boxing research (e.g. Woodward, 2004, 2007; Paradis, 2012; Wacquant, 2004; Matthews, 2015). Perhaps the risk of physical harm is overstated here. As Sugden (1996: 173) notes:

‘boxing is a relatively safe sport. In England and Wales, for instance, between 1986 and 1992 there were 412 fatal accidents related to sport. Only one of these deaths was as a consequence of boxing, whereas eighty-seven people had died while taking part in motor sports, eighty-two when flying or parachuting, forty-six while playing ball games and sixty-five on mountainsides or in caves. In the United states, for every one hundred thousand participants, the chance of death in boxing has been estimated at one, compared, for instance with scuba diving at eleven, hang gliding at fifty-five and horse racing at 128’.

However, death should not be a baseline measurement of harm. As has been variously noted throughout this thesis boxing entails hitting other people, hopefully more than they hit you, and hopefully to the extent that they cannot continue. Harmful, though overwhelmingly not deadly, activity is therefore what is being studied.

For this reason, the procedural ethical approval process prior to the commensuration of field research became an elongated process, taking approximately three months. Two related issues surrounding physical harm were the core issues underpinning this process: one being the issue of physical harm to participants by other participants, the other being the risk of physical harm being caused to or by the researcher.

The first of these issues was easily resolved, in the following way (extracted from the accepted ethical approval form):

This research is concerned with boxing, a sport which necessarily entails that harm is caused to its practitioners on occasion. As such, there is a risk of physical harm to participants in this research, although this risk is created by consensual involvement in boxing and not as a result of the research *per se*. Involvement in boxing is not facilitated by this research: indeed, those boxing have chosen to do so voluntarily and would do so whether or not this research takes place. Agreement to partake in this research is indeed a decision taken apart from and after the decision to partake in the sport.

The issues of physical harm to participants by researcher and vice versa were however more convoluted. My involvement at Shadcote Boxing Club was not facilitated by the research: I chose to box voluntarily, and did so regardless of the research. Though this should not automatically be taken as evidence that such an approach is ethical, other ethnographic research on boxing has been allowed to commence wherein the researcher participates fully in the sport (*e.g.* Wacquant, 2004; Matthews, 2015; Paradis, 2012; Littaye, 2016) which arguably sets something of a precedent here. There is, however, no additional risk derived from me being a researcher, sparring with those who are both consenting to the activity as boxers and participants.

Whether such an approach is ethical became irrelevant, as the University insurance brokers decided they would not insure such an approach. That is, this became not an ethical matter *per se*, but a matter of insurance and risk management, wherein non-academic staff pronounced methodological expertise over those with scholarly knowledge. Ultimately, the following statement was included in the ethical approval form for this study, written by the University's insurers, by which I was compelled to abide:

The University is allowing the researcher to take part in the non-contact training sessions under the instruction of the coach. The University is not allowing the researcher to take part in any contact part of the training session as part of the research. If the researcher wishes to take part in the contact part of the training session this is done so at their own risk and is not part of the research or university activity.

I speculate that there was some ideological censure involved in this decision making, based upon the under-valuation of the sociology of sport (Bourdieu, 1988b) and the image of boxing as deviant (Wacquant, 1995a). I would hasten to suggest that had I elected to research other sports in which there is a risk of harm that such an approach would not have been demanded. Participatory ethnographic research has for instance been undertaken in BASE jumping/skydiving (Laurendeau, 2012) and rock climbing (Robinson, 2008), both of which Sugden (1996) notes are more dangerous than boxing.

It may be that the ontological assumptions of those involved in the decision-making processes for university research are not necessarily correct. As relayed in the section on constructionism in this chapter, social reality appears to actors as an objective social world, and one therefore wherein positivistic knowledge production suffices. Philosophical analysis of the state of the social world indicates that to conduct sociological research an analysis of meaningful conduct is required. As Bryman (2004: 279) baldly states a foundational feature of qualitative research is 'seeing through the eyes of the people being studied'. Indeed, given the discussion above pertaining to reflexivity and the complexity of induction, this approach is ill-informed. It is impossible to fully separate self in the capacity discussed above. This decree is, however, addressed by not reflecting directly upon my own contact parts of training.

A few weeks into the fieldwork I made the following note:

'It is such a shame that I cannot include my experience of sparring with others in my analysis. It is sort of like a dance, working off each other's movement, almost like an out-of-body experience. Strangely, what I can most directly compare it to is a moment I had about age 14, whilst learning guitar. I had been learning the solo to Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen for some time. I had been struggling with it, not getting it entirely right over and over again, but on one occasion I played it perfectly. The interesting thing about this however was not that I was playing it correctly, but that I was doing so without thinking about it. Indeed, I remember looking down at my fingers on the fretboard and feeling detached from them, as it was happening, as if I was not commanding them to move, but that they were moving by themselves. This makes little sense, perhaps, but is a feeling that is incredibly hard to explain' (field notes, Jan 15th).

This field note from my second week in the field, in which I reflect on my experience of sparring prior to this research, aligns well with the extant literature on boxing research methods wherein the body becomes a tool for knowing (Matthews, 2015; Littaye, 2016). That I made an analytical connection between playing guitar and boxing may immediately seem unusual, though links have elsewhere been forged between the two (Rotella, 2002). The Blues guitarist Buddy Guy (Guitar Center, 2014: 2.15) has remarked, for instance: 'You can tell me you' the best prizefighter in the world but if I don't see you knock nobody out you ain't proved it to me, and that's the way I look at my music'. Indeed, there is an emphasis on practical application of embodied knowledge both in the performance of music (Sudnow, 2001; Faulkner and Becker, 2009) and sport (Wacquant, 2004; Young, 2005). For instance, Sudnow's (2001) *Ways of The Hand* represents jazz musicianship as an embodied practice, in which he (in a similar way to my field note above) reflects that 'I had the most vivid impression that my fingers seemed to be making music by themselves' (Sudnow, 2001: 2). Dreyfus (in Sudnow, 2001) draws connections between Sudnow's scholarship and Merleau-Ponty's (1942/1963) theory of embodiment, which has also been applied to bodily-performance contexts (e.g. Purser, 2011). What the findings and theory produced from this study would have been had I been able to continue to reflect upon my own body as it communicated and tangled with others in the ring is ultimately now forever bound to be guesswork. It can therefore be said research governance, broadly construed as including bureaucratic processes underpinning university ethics committees, is ill-equipped to legislate for ethnographic research, and impacted upon knowledge production and communication in this research context.

#### **4.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality is foremost a matter of privacy (Bryman, 2004) and relates to 'assuring the information that [participants] divulge will be held in confidence' (Finch, 2001: 34). Between these statements it can be said that confidentiality pertains to the notion that information will not be shared with others such that personal lives of participants are made public. Anonymity relates to removing any information from social research data and accounts which render participants identifiable or traceable (Punch, 2013). Whilst confidentiality and anonymity are not synonymous or equivalent concepts,

they are related (Boddy, 2016). As Wiles *et al.* (2006: 7) note: '[t]he chief way that researchers seek to protect research participants from the accidental breaking of confidentiality is through the process of anonymisation'. As is common procedure (Coffey *et al.*, 2012), the real names of places and people directly relevant to the study are replaced with pseudonyms (Bryman, 2004).

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter was concerned with the research strategy designed to answer the research questions identified via the preceding literature review chapters. The chapter commenced with discussion of the philosophy of social science. A constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology were adopted, based on the theorisation that social reality exists through intersubjective meaning and that knowledge production necessarily requires analysis of such meaning.

Qualitative methods were identified as suited to this research. Qualitative research can be characterised as inductive in its reasoning: theory is produced via data collection, which is essentially a process of exploration. Exploration is required for this research, given that no research exists on white-collar boxing in this national context, and only one other account globally. The qualitative methods identified for this research were participant observation and semi-structured life history interviews. Together, these methods can be understood to form an ethnographic approach.

Data produced through both methods was thematically analysed, and put under critical scrutiny via engagement with extant theory (and indeed vice versa – data was used to put extant theory under scrutiny) to situate white-collar boxing within the wider social schema, and in doing so connecting the micro and macro. Thematic analysis, whilst being an inductive technique, does not only entail that theory is produced from data. Induction is more complex, given that social reality is always viewed through a socially constructed lens. Likewise, objectivity is an impossibility in social research in that the researcher co-constitutes the object of analysis.

Finally, ethics were discussed. All research has ethical issues. In this research, physical harm was especially pertinent, given that the research is concerned with a form of fighting. It was decided that my research



participation should be limited at the point of physical contact with others. Whilst this has been discussed in the ethics section of this chapter, ultimately it is the view here that it is not ethics *per se* that guided this decision. Non-experts presided in terms of expertise over experts, and the decision to forbid this approach was taken to render the university not liable for any harm caused during the research, as opposed to being concerned with harm as such.

The following chapter introduces Shadcote Boxing Club in ethnographic terms, though it also bears some further methodological prose relating to access and my position in the field.

## **5. Welcome to Shadcote Boxing Club**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Whilst boxing can be simply understood as fist-fighting for sport (Chapter 2), the sport can be dissected in various capacities. This chapter seeks to introduce white-collar boxing as it is undertaken at Shadcote Boxing Club. Like other forms of the sport, white-collar boxing is a complex phenomenon. There is only one other elaborate account of white-collar boxing in existence, to date (Trimbur, 2013). As this chapter will indicate, whilst nominally the same, they are different in practice. This chapter therefore provides an overview of a phenomenon that has essentially been hitherto unaddressed in academic terms.

### **5.2 Locating Shadcote Boxing Club**

Shadcote is the pseudonym here given to a suburb of a city in the Midlands of England in which the boxing club is situated. This city is given the pseudonym Redtown. The population of Redtown is between 200,000 and 400,000 and the ethnic makeup of the city is between 70 and 80 per cent white British. Shadcote has a small high street, hosting a mixture of chain stores, pawn shops, charity shops and independent retailers. Largely, however, Shadcote is a residential area, and the built environment near Shadcote is a mix of privately and housing association owned terraced and semi-detached houses, maisonettes and flats. Though positioned within a residential suburb, Shadcote Boxing Club is itself situated on commercial and industrial land. Surrounding the club are takeaways, an out-of-town casino, an off-license, a furniture shop and a large hardware store. More immediately, the club is adjoined to a semi-abandoned warehouse at the rear, and to the side another sports facility, which people sometimes mistakenly walk into looking for the boxing.

Standing outside the club it is impossible to see inside, and vice versa. There are no windows that can be seen from the street, and whilst there are windows along one side of the club these are frosted. There are however photographs, printed on plywood boards and fitted to the front of the club. These photographs are of boxers, weightlifters and bodybuilders: all male,

all white, all ripped. Above these boards there are two large signs. One of these signs is a line drawing of an uncharacteristically muscular male weightlifter, mid-deadlift, with the words SHADCOTE GYM underneath. The other is a line drawing of the top half of a male boxer with the words SHADCOTE BOXING CLUB underneath. Unlike most of the buildings around it, the club is a single-story building, and situated on top of the club's front, is a wind-battered and ragged St George's Cross on a flagpole. Whilst you cannot see into the building from the outside, the outer walls of the boxing club perhaps give an indication to the world beyond it that this is a place concerned with the production of muscular English manhood. Stepping into Shadcote Boxing Club further confirms this.

### **5.3 Stepping into Shadcote Boxing Club**

Though referred to as the front door, the main entrance to the club is on the side of the building. Walk through it and you enter a small reception area. To the left are a couple of chairs and a small cabinet containing trophies from boxing events, bodybuilding competitions, alongside a small range of unbranded boxing and weightlifting equipment for sale. To the right is a counter. Depending on the time of day, Rick will be sitting behind it, overseeing the club and acknowledging people who enter. He is usually the first person you meet when entering the club. He is the head coach and owner of the boxing club, and to understand the aesthetic of the club it is necessary to know a bit about him. As Berger and Luckmann (1967) note, structure is intersubjectively formed through action and vice versa. This can be taken to include physical, material structures in the form of objects, and in this case a boxing club, of which Rick is principal architect, whose actions are, like all actors, socially informed. Rick is white, and proud of it. He is a proud Englishman. Indeed, he is a 'hot' nationalist (Billig, 1995) who understands whiteness to be a signifier of Englishness.

As the signage of the club indicates, the building does not only host the boxing club, but also a weightlifting gym. Both institutions are owned by Rick and are part of the same organisation, though the traditional weightlifting gym and the boxing club are distinguishable in terms of members and physical space they occupy in the gym. The weightlifting gym is not the subject of this thesis, though it should be noted that other boxing gyms may resemble this arrangement (Matthews, 2016). That both facilities

are on the same site and part of the same organisation provides an indication that this is a site concerned with the production of strong, tough men.

The building has a floor space of approximately 200m<sup>2</sup>, with half being the weightlifting gym and half being the boxing club. The building is narrow (approximately 20 metres long, 10 metres wide) creating a feeling of tightness (were the building approximately 14m x 14m then it would be square, still roughly 200m<sup>2</sup>, but less like a corridor). Strip lighting runs along the ceiling throughout, and little is concealed under the artificial light. Some of the wall-space is mirrored, giving the illusion of the club being roomier than is the case, but nonetheless space is noticeably tight. Being small, and often full of bodies getting hot and sweaty, the mirrors often steam up to the point that they are no longer reflective. Indeed, the air itself is sometimes misty. This mist is invisible to those within it, but, if you arrive midway through a training session, as I sometimes did during fieldwork, you can see it hanging in the air throughout the club.

The walls are heavily decorated, hosting a collage of artefacts, mainly related to boxing. These include: pictures of boxers (topless, muscular men brandishing their fists and furrowing their brows), newspaper clippings of reports covering fights, gloves signed by famous boxers – sometimes in display cases, sometimes not – and regalia of local boxing heroes. As with other boxing gyms (Woodward, 2007), pictures of Rocky Balboa are littered in amongst the pictures of 'real' boxers. One of these pictures has been edited so that Rocky is wearing a Shadcote Boxing Club vest. Rocky Balboa is placed in the gym as he signifies tough, working-class, white masculinity. Another picture of Rocky overlooks the ring.

Less overtly related to boxing, however, during fieldwork '[a] huge picture of two white women in seductive positions lifting weights' was put up on one of the walls; 'the lads comment that they can't concentrate with it up, but like it' (adapted from fieldnotes, 18th March, 2015). Multiple St George's Crosses and Union Jacks are on display inside the club, at least one per wall. Some of the walls are emblazoned with slogans too, either printed onto signs or painted straight onto the wall in bold black capital letters, the largest of these stating: 'BUILT THROUGH SUFFERING'. As all of this is simultaneously presented on the walls of the boxing club, it is difficult to immediately dissect these different objects for their meaning. They are collectively arranged in such a way that they equate to more than the sum of their parts (*i.e.* the boxing club) to the extent that they are not experienced as individual

artefacts. Whilst these items hang on the walls, they also *are* the walls. Once analysed, however, they indicate that Shadcote Boxing Club is a place encoded with strikingly modern symbolism, these symbols pertaining to nation, race, class and gender.

The back wall is in the line of vision of all who enter the club. This wall is less densely covered with artefacts than the other walls. Rather, it hosts four main features. One of these is a large St George's Cross, modified so that along the horizontal axis of its cross is written ENGLAND. Next to this are two custom-made signs. One of these reads: 'IN THE FACE OF DEATH NEVER SURRENDER'. The other is a plaque of the boxing club logo, the same as it is presented on the outside of the club: a line drawing of a male boxer with Shadcote Boxing Club written underneath. Finally, there is a collage of photos framed of club lads past and present – mostly past – all of whom are white. This wall display is a clear message of the ethos for the club, and an overt display of the associations made between the condition of being male, tough, English, white and boxer.

The population of Shadcote fluctuates depending on whether a white-collar boxing training camp is underway. In brief, white-collar boxing camps take place over eight-week periods, and there is roughly a month between one camp ending and the next starting. During white-collar training camps, given the small size of the club, space in which to train is often limited. As such, sometimes the semi-abandoned warehouse adjoined to the gym is used for extra space, particularly when there is a new intake of white-collar boxers, which dramatically increases the number of people training there. Though the warehouse backs onto the gym, to access it you have to walk around the corner, and accordingly, 'round the corner' is how to the warehouse is referred. The warehouse is cold, dusty and bare – it contains no boxing equipment – but suffices as a place to train. At Shadcote, *function* is certainly valued over *form*.

Steve describes the club as a 'spit and sawdust' (Steve, interview) kind of place. Many others do too. For Nev this means that 'there's no frills kinda thing, does what it says on the tin kinda thing' (Nev, interview). For Gary, this means that 'it's not a gym where everyone's got designer stuff and they don't wanna get it sweaty or they wanna... people actually go to that gym to work out' (Gary, interview). 'The gym lads' (people who lift weights at the gym regularly) and 'club lads' (people who train at the boxing club regularly) often arrive in work vans, wearing (and sometimes training in) work clothes

(such as *Dickies* work trousers, hi-vis vests, steel toe capped boots). Work, particularly, but not exclusively, the strains of manual work, is a common topic of conversation in the gym. It is a working class, masculine space, much like other boxing gyms (Trimbur, 2013; Sugden, 1996; McKenzie, 2015).

There is one unusual direct point of connection between the boxing club and the world beyond it. The corrugated iron roof leaks directly into the centre of the ring. Even when it is not raining you are reminded of this: there is a faded patch on the ring canvas, stained by dirty water. There are other stains on the canvas too, blood and spit, but these are darker and less obvious. This is locatable in terms of masculinity and class too. The following field diary extracts details the materiality of Shadcote in these terms.

'The roof is leaking. Dripping right into middle of ring. I jokingly say to Rick that it's a health and safety issue as Chad slips on it. 'Never say those words to me again' he says. Pretty sure he is actually annoyed. 'Health and fucking safety my arse' he mutters under his breath as he walks off' (adapted from field notes, 15th January, 2015).

Health and safety precautions, being a bureaucratic exercise, requiring submission to authority and in this circumstance to make life less dangerous, clash with the physically strong and tough, individualistic masculine ethos which Rick embodies and the club reflects. Materially coarse environments are, by and large, rejected as desirable on a class basis (Bourdieu, 2010) but here this valuation is unimportant and rejected by Rick. In rejecting this, Rick refuses to engage with the dominant system of classification of material objects and imbuing his material situation with meaning through which his club, indeed life, can be valued positively. This is an example of a wider point: as Rick noted at various points during fieldwork, he envisions the gym as 'an island', and he will 'fight to the death to keep it'. It is a space over which he has control, and through which he can construct a being in the world which can be construed as magnificent. The materiality of the gym should be understood as 'a convergence of desires, moralities and structures' (Back, 2015: 824), in this case these desires being formed at the intersection of class, gender, nationality and race.

Shadcote Boxing Club is obviously unique in that the specific dimensions of the building coupled with the choice of placement for the posters, pictures

and other decorative objects discussed above means that nowhere else is quite like it. However, the decorations on display are not given symbolic meaning through Shadcote. National flags are a prime and obvious example of this, although the same could be said of the meaning imbued upon and by pictures of boxers, who in the social imaginary both inside and outside of boxing circles have historically represented tough masculinity (Woodward, 2007). As one participant, who had extensive experience of being in boxing clubs, noted in interview in relation to the Shadcote aesthetic: 'it's a boxing club at the end of the day'.

#### **5.4 Shadcote Boxing Club Timetable**

The following is the timetable by which Shadcote Boxing Club operates on a weekly basis. Club Training refers to times during which club members (discussed below) train collectively under the instruction of coaching staff. Likewise, White-Collar Training refers to times during which white-collars (discussed below) train collectively under the instruction of coaching staff. Sparring (see Chapter 7) refers to full-contact boxing, resembling a boxing match, though in the context of a gym. Sparring sessions are included in the timetable separate from training. White-collars and club members both attend sparring sessions.

**Monday:** 19:00-20:30 Club Training; 20.30-22:00 White-Collar Training

**Tuesday:** 17:00-19:00 Sparring

**Wednesday:** 19:00-20:30 Club Training; 20.30-22:00 White-Collar Training

**Thursday:** 18:00-19:30 Club Training

**Friday:** 18:00-19:30 Sparring

**Saturday:** 10:00-11:30 Club and White-Collar Training

**Sunday:** 12:00-13:30 Sparring

As will be discussed further below, white collar boxing training camps last eight weeks, with approximately a month between one camp ending and the next beginning. As such the above timetable is reduced at points during which there is no white-collar camp underway.

Whilst Shadcote Boxing Club runs training sessions at the above times, it is open 7am-9pm on weekdays and 10am-4pm at weekends. As such the club is also used outside of timetabled training times. On arrangement with coaches, a group of club lads, for instance, who wish for extra sparring might arrange a time outside of the timetable during which they can all meet at the gym for an hour to do so. My fieldwork routine essentially reflects the above timetable, though occasionally, if I knew of sparring being undertaken outside of the usual times, I would attend then too (Chapter 4). However, for the most part, the boxing club is quiet and unattended during the day. It comes to life after 5pm, when the club lads filter in to train.

## **5.5 The Social Categories of Shadcote Boxing Club**

As with other boxing gyms, there are various social categories at Shadcote Boxing Club. These are introduced below, presented as ideal types, constructed based on how actors at the club are spoken about in interviews, and according to practice at the club. In some cases, these categories are temporally-dependent. References are made to notable examples of where this is the case. The typology is loosely hierarchical.

### **5.5.1 Staff**

The coaching team at Shadcote Boxing Club are referred to as 'the staff', or just 'staff'. Rick is the head coach who works full-time at Shadcote Boxing Club and Shadcote Gym. Another two coaches are employed part-time to assist in the provision of timetabled training, but are employed elsewhere in jobs unrelated to boxing on a full-time basis. Further to this there are four further volunteer coaches, not always present, but drawn upon to help during busy training periods. There are also two professional boxers involved with the club on an informal basis, who volunteer as coaches, understood as members of staff.

Beyond this, during white-collar training sessions some club lads become members of staff. The population of Shadcote Boxing Club increases during white-collar training camps, and resources are stretched. Club lads work on a voluntary basis, assisting in the training of white-collarers. Some club lads are also paid to assist in the running of white-collar fight nights, during which times they are understood as staff. In this capacity, I was a member of staff at Shadcote.



### **5.5.2 Club Lads**

Club lads are men who regularly train at Shadcote Boxing Club. I was one such club lad prior to this research, and it is in this capacity that I negotiated access to the club to conduct this research. Many of the club lads participate in white-collar boxing matches, but do not belong to the gym's white-collar social category (discussed below). Whereas white-collars participate in boxing at the gym for a limited time and are not club members, club lads are members and their boxing experience is not limited to eight weeks. Moreover, whilst club lads participate in white-collar boxing matches, they are not restricted to participation in white-collar matches, but may also participate in unlicensed matches. Some club lads may only train recreationally, and do not compete at all. Furthermore, some may have previously competed as unlicensed, white-collar and to lesser extent amateur boxers, though now only train recreationally. Emphatically, none of the club lads are professional boxers, but 'hobbyists' (Rick, interview), who to differing degrees take their hobby seriously. Most club lads are white, English heterosexual men, and indeed as will be explored throughout this thesis race, nationality, gender and social class inform interaction at the club.

### **5.5.3 White-Collars**

The term white-collar is a shortened articulation of white-collar boxer, pertaining to those who participate in eight-week white-collar training camps. Whilst during these training camps white-collars are the most numerous group in the gym, they are not members of Shadcote. As such, white-collar boxers are notionally limited to allocated white-collar training times.

Whilst this will be discussed further in this chapter, and in greater detail in the following chapter, the label white-collar, in the context of Shadcote Boxing Club, does not refer to the social class or employment status of the person to whom it is applied. This is unlike the NYC context (Trimbur, 2013), discussed at length in both literature review chapters, wherein it was established that the category of white-collar reflects the social class of practitioners. To provide a pertinent interview excerpt at this initial stage to support this assertion, when asked what is meant by the term white-collar boxing, Will, reflecting on his entry to Shadcote as a white-collar, noted that:

'I thought it was gonna be, I don't know why I thought this, I thought it was gonna be a lot of office workers um that would come together and basically have a scrap, you know a lot of higher class, middle higher-class people that would come together and have a scrap um I've since found out obviously that's not the case'.

Whilst the majority of white-collars only attend Shadcote Boxing Club for the duration of the eight-week white-collar boxing programme, some continue to attend and become members, for the most part becoming club lads. The term white-collar at Shadcote typically only pertains to male white-collars. Female white-collar boxers are ascribed the label 'girl' or 'lass'. As with the club lads, white-collars are not necessarily from Shadcote, but various areas in Redtown, and sometimes outside Redtown, though within the same county.

#### **5.5.4 Girls**

Though all participants are adults in this fieldwork context, female attendees of Shadcote Boxing Club are referred to as girls, though sometimes also as lasses, and occasionally women. In other research contexts (*e.g.* Trimbur, 2013; Paradis, 2012) women at boxing clubs are categorised as separate to men, though occupying multiple categories. At Shadcote, perhaps because the gym has a small population in comparison to other boxing clubs and women make up approximately a tenth of this population, this single category exists. Occasionally, the terms club lass and white-collar lass are respectively employed to differentiate between women who are undertaking white-collar training and those who are club members. The long-term membership of the club has very few women: the term girl therefore overall signifies women who participate in white-collar boxing. The terminology girl is used by men and women at Shadcote to identify female white-collar boxers.

#### **5.5.5 Eastern Europeans**

There is a minority of participants at Shadcote from various countries in Eastern Europe, constructed as belonging to the somewhat reductionist category of Eastern Europeans. All these participants are male. Though in

practice they may participate in either white-collar or club training sessions, they are overall constructed as a separate social group. The limited data (Chapter 4) regarding this group, suggest this construction is not one only projected by the English members of the club, but also inwardly felt by those belonging to this group. As one participant from this group noted in interview:

'I don't really think people [at Shadcote] ever ask me where I was from even though I have a very strong accent. I think the only persons who asked me were [...] foreigners. And I think that, okay, with, I think that I asked Alex where he was from, and I said, 'ah ok, I'm from Eastern Europe too' [...] it was something to build rapport on'.

Eastern Europeans are discussed at various points throughout this thesis, though in Chapter 7 in particular.

## **5.6 White-Collar Boxing: Sketching the Process**

White-collar boxing at Shadcote follows a particular temporal form. Most white-collar boxers undertake the sport for no more than eight weeks. This process is further outlined below, though in brief it entails white-collar boxers signing up to eight weeks' training at Shadcote in order to participate in a full-contact boxing match at the end of this training period, against another white-collar boxer alongside whom they have been training. This process will now be outlined.

### **5.6.1 Signing Up**

Shadcote Boxing Club works with a white-collar boxing promotion company that organises white-collar boxing events around the Midlands. Henceforth, this promotion company is referred to as White-Collar Boxing Ltd. This pseudonym is chosen for its neutrality thereby not identifying the promotion company: many white-collar boxing promotion companies have more exciting or spectacular names. A Birmingham-based promotion, for instance, is called Hitman Promotions, and runs events called White Collar Boxing Championship and Fightmania (Hitman Promotions, 2017).

White-collar boxers mostly sign up for white-collar boxing training at Shadcote via White-Collar Boxing Ltd, via text message or an online form. To a lesser extent, white-collar boxers may sign up through visiting the club. White-collar training camps are often oversubscribed, and those who sign up to participate may not be able to do so on the next scheduled programme, and must wait for the one after. White-collars accepted onto the programme receive a confirmation text message from White-Collar Boxing Ltd, notifying them of their start date, and the date of an introductory meeting held at Shadcote Boxing Club.

### **5.6.2 The Introductory Meeting**

The week before white-collar training camps commence, those signed up are required to attend an introductory meeting at the club to outline the process. This meeting can be understood as an induction to white-collar boxing. This is the first time that white-collar boxers enter the club, and often the first time they have entered any boxing club. New white-collars gather around the entrance of the club, some inside, some outside. They are mostly quiet and subdued, eyes-down. A few nervously make conversation. Some may have signed up together, and are chattier. Around 80 new white-collars attend these meetings, and when most are present, they are ushered down to the ring. Typically, the staff and some of the club lads (especially those who occupy the position of club lad/staff) are present at this induction, though it is for the most part conducted by a representative from White-Collar Boxing Ltd. The rep, the staff and the club lads stand in the ring, with the white-collars gathered around it. The ring is raised off the ground, and in this way acts as a stage. The rep steps forward and gives the introductory speech:

'Ladies and Gentlemen! Welcome to Shadcote Boxing Club, where you will be spending the next eight weeks training, for free, to get you ready for the experience of a lifetime: fighting in front of all your friends and family in a glamorous location that many professional boxers can only dream of fighting in. Thousands of people will be chanting your name, as you enter to the ring under the spotlights, to your own music. Before all of this, though, you will be trained by the team here. Take a look around, because the person you will be fighting is in this room,

and you will find out who your opponent is at the weigh-in, just before fight night. All that is required of you is that you raise money for charity by setting up a *Just Giving* account, that you sell twenty tickets to your fight, and that you attend the allocated free training sessions. And remember: you are not only fighting another person, you are also part of the fight against this awful disease' (field notes, paraphrased).

During fieldwork, this introductory talk was also supplemented with a statement about this research. This was approximately as follows:

'an additional feature of white-collar boxing at Shadcote currently is Ed Wright, who as well as being one of the club lads here, is a researcher at the University of Nottingham [the representative points to me, as I am standing in the ring behind him]. Further information is available from Ed, and there are also information sheets around the gym you can read' (adapted from fieldnotes).

The boxing club becomes very busy with new white-collar intakes, and immediately informing all of those at the gym of the nature of the study would have been difficult. This talk is the only time in the process that all new white-collar boxers are gathered together to be given information, as opposed to training, and the inclusion of information about this study in this talk was a straightforward way of initially informing participants of this study. As noted in my field diary for this reason 'I am glad' that the representative included this in his speech.

The above talk, aside from the unusual inclusion of information relating to this study, indicates much about the white-collar boxing process. In being an eight-week experience, one that culminates in a boxing match that in terms of grandeur and capacity outsizes many professional boxing events, white-collar boxing can be understood to be presented as the condensation of an idealised version of the professional boxing career (Chapter 3). In this respect, though these particular constructions are not used at Shadcote, similar white-collar boxing programmes conducted elsewhere in England are referred to as *rookie-to-Rocky* or *beginner-to-winner* programmes. Professional boxing events contain an element of fantasy and through participation professional boxers may be constructed as heroes (Woodward, 2007), though sustaining such events are years of hard slog. White-collar boxing events can be understood as a reproduction of professional boxing

events, through participation in which the engagement with the fantastic and glorious element of professional boxing can be experienced in some capacity, without the preceding career.

It is also salient to note from the above talk that participation in white-collar boxing at Shadcote is constructed as free in monetary terms, though raising money for charity and selling tickets is a requirement. This can be understood as a philanthrocapitalist arrangement (McGoey, 2014) and will be discussed further in 5.7. In brief, however, white-collar boxing is not free; the revenue generated from ticket sales amounts to the purchasing of this experience. It can therefore also be understood in terms of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Unlike other ventures in the experience economy, however, there is an unavoidable corporeal requirement of boxing to be physically fit. Moreover, part of the experience of being a professional boxer is training 'like a pro'. Indeed, *Train Like A Pro Boxing Challenge (TLAP)* is the name of an organisation equivalent to White-Collar Boxing Ltd based in Buckinghamshire, England (tlap.co.uk, 2017).

### **5.6.3 Training**

Most of the eight weeks of the white-collar camp are spent training at Shadcote. This training is designed to teach participants the rudiments of boxing, and physically prepare white-collar boxers for their forthcoming fight. White-collar boxing matches take place over three two-minute rounds – shorter than most boxing matches. Professional boxing matches are between four and twelve rounds, typically lasting three minutes each, and amateur boxing matches tend to have three rounds lasting three minutes (Chapter 2). Nonetheless, the ability to last for three two-minute rounds requires a high level of fitness. As one participant noted in interview, reflecting on the fitness required of white-collar boxers: 'lots of people are like 'yeah I could fight for six minutes, it's only six minutes. No, no you can't [laughs, shaking head]. Fighting for a minute is hard enough' (Isaac, interview).

Much of the white-collar boxing training is focussed on making white-collar boxers fit enough to fight. As with other boxing contexts (Sugden, 1996), interval training is used, meaning that exercises are undertaken for two minutes, as this reflects the length of a round of boxing, followed by a break, followed by another two minutes' training. The exercises undertaken are

almost exclusively 'pad-work'. Pad-work here entails one white-collar wearing a pair of mitts that act as targets to be punched. Another white-collar, wearing boxing gloves will be given a combination of punches to repeat for the given time. A note on boxing terminology and fighting form is necessary here. Differing terminology exists for some of these punches (for instance a jab-cross may also be called a one-two, a cross-jab may also be called a two-one) though these are the terms used at Shadcote:

I am a left-handed, that is, southpaw boxer. An orthodox boxer is essentially a right-handed boxer. Most boxers are orthodox boxers, and an orthodox boxing stance is as follows and for southpaws should be reversed: feet shoulder-width apart with the right foot back and left foot forward. If one imagines a line running down the centre of the body, the lead foot should be angled in such a way that the toes are on the centre-line, and the rear foot so that the heel is on the centre-line. Positioning the feet in this way means that the centre-line of the body is less exposed, and notionally cannot be hit by the opponent when standing head to head. It also entails that the right hand becomes the rear hand, and the left hand the lead. Hands are placed on the chin, which is tucked into the chest and behind the lead shoulder. Elbows are tucked into the body to protect it. A jab is a straight lead punch, and a cross is a straight rear. A hook is a punch wherein the arm is bent at roughly 90 degrees at the elbow. Through pivoting on the foot, the body twists and the fist travels on a horizontal arc towards the target. An uppercut is similar, though follows a vertical arc. In terms of defence: a slip entails moving the head to the side to evade a punch – typically a jab or a cross. A roll/bob-and-weave entails moving the head underneath a hook through bending the legs and shifting the body. A parry entails deflecting an incoming punch with the gloves (adapted from field notes).

Most of the pad-work undertaken entails simple three-punch combinations that can be used in fight situations. It may also incorporate defensive manoeuvres. Pad-work is not only undertaken, however, to develop boxing skills but to improve fitness. Punching for two minutes straight is tiring. Though it might seem that only the arms are being exercised, through the twisting described briefly above, the legs and core are exercised too. Whilst

rounds of pad-work mirror rounds in the ring in terms of duration, often the breaks between exercises are shorter than that between rounds in a boxing match. Whereas there is a minute between boxing rounds, the break between exercises is typically 30 seconds. An additional exercise is often included in this break. These may take the form of exercises (*e.g.* press-ups, squats, burpees) undertaken for the building of strength, as opposed to developing cardio-vascular endurance. Shortening the breaks between rounds of pad-work means that come fight night the fighter is used to only a 30 second break, meaning that they will recuperate better during the minute between rounds of fighting. Training always ends with abdominal conditioning, normally in the form of 100 sit-ups: the need for strong abs is crucial in boxing, as that area of the body is a prime target for being hit. Boxing matches are often stopped by 'knockout' via body shots: the boxer is not knocked unconscious in these scenarios, but is hurt to the extent they cannot get to their feet and be fit to continue with the ten count (Oates, 2006).

This training format is undertaken to produce bodies capable of inflicting and sustaining damaging blows in a relatively short space of time. As per white-collar boxing elsewhere there is less emphasis on the perhaps 'boring components' (Trimbur, 2013: 134) of boxing training. Skipping is a form of exercise often used in boxing training for various reasons, including the development of leg strength and footwork. Footwork is as much about defence as it is about offence. Skipping is rarely, if ever, undertaken by white-collar boxers at Shadcote. The club is too small to have 80 people swinging ropes about, and on a practical level is impossible. However, that skipping is not undertaken also reflects the relative lack of attention paid to defence in general. Other footwork drills are never undertaken. In this respect, whilst white-collar boxing aims to deliver the professional boxing experience, the training is not the same as that which professional boxers would typically undertake. One of the few professional boxers present at Shadcote noted of the training, comparing it to his own regime: 'Fitness-wise, [white-collar boxing training is] just as intense, if not more-so'. He continued: 'it's some of the hardest training there is around, y'know, there's not much difference between that and a pro, other than the technique and the drill work'.

White-collar boxing at Shadcote in this respect resembles white-collar boxing at Gleason's. As Trimbur (2013: 134) notes 'the more aggressive and



enchanted practices of boxing, such as padwork and sparring' are undertaken, and an intensive workout is provided, without much development of defence, or the finer craft of the sport. White-collar boxing at Gleason's does not follow an eight-week schedule towards fight night, however, which may indicate a different reason for the absence of these aspects of boxing. Rick's 'dream' is 'to improve the boxing, so Redtown is known as a white-collar where they're *boxing* and it's not just two people that are getting in just to raise money for charity'. Being bound by an eight-week time frame, however, it is difficult to produce well-rounded boxers. White-collar boxers at Gleason's are not temporally-bound to eight weeks of boxing training and defensive work is wilfully neglected (Trimbur, 2013). At Shadcote, it is substituted by offensive training, but is also included in padwork, and the time frame does not allow for its further development.

Similarly, whereas sparring at Gleason's is undertaken by white-collar boxers for recreational purposes, it is optional, and often entails professionals being sent to 'play' (Trimbur, 2013: 130) with white-collars, sparring at Shadcote is mandatory and does not resemble play. Notably, sparring is undertaken to monitor the progress of white-collars, and serves as a basis for the coaches to judge how white-collar boxers fare against one another to match-make for fight night. White-collar boxing is in every instance there undertaken to compete (Chapter 7).

#### **5.6.4 The Weigh-in**

The end of the training camp is marked by the weigh-in. Weigh-ins occur in various forms of boxing, primarily to check that two boxers, due to compete against one another, are within an agreed weight limit to ensure the fight is fair. Though this may immediately seem counter-intuitive, in white-collar boxing the weigh-in does not serve the purpose of weighing fighters. Fights in white-collar boxing are not matched on weight. Weigh-ins in white-collar boxing therefore serve a different function to that in amateur and professional boxing where competition is weight-dependent, and measuring weight is a stringent process. Rather, the weigh-in serves to replicate the weigh-ins prior to professional boxing title fights, thereby allowing white-collar boxers to experience this aspect of being a professional boxer. The weigh-in can also be understood as a ritual marking the end of training, and the beginning of fight night (see Chapter 8).

### **5.6.5 Fight Night**

The form that white-collar boxing matches take in terms of rounds has been outlined above. The events themselves have not however been outlined, and this section gives a brief indication of the form white-collar boxing events take. White-collar boxing events take place outside of the gym. The four events attended during this research were in conference and events facilities at sports stadia and upmarket hotels. The hotels were arguably less spectacular venues than the sports stadia, though all fight nights can be spectacular affairs. Crowds of between 800 and 3000 attended these events, which are black tie occasions. Each white-collar boxer makes their entrance to the ring with their own ring music and ring name. There are typically 20 fights per event. After fight night, the vast majority of white-collar boxers never return to Shadcote, the white-collar boxing experience having been completed (see Chapter 9).

### **5.6.6 Theoretical Reflections on this Sketch**

In Chapters 2 and 3 white-collar boxing was situated as a late-modern phenomenon, given that it has only existed since the 1980s and that it can be characterised as a post-industrial consumption practice. At this stage, this argument can be developed. Various scholars note that hallmarks of late modernity are acceleration of time and the resultant different form of social existence (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Urry, 2009). Bauman (2013a: 4) notes for instance that: 'the changing role and perception of time can serve as a paradigmatic feature of the ongoing cultural revolution'. White-collar boxing can be understood in this way, as Rick notes:

Rick: Whereas I think the ABA thing has got a long feel to it, a long progression, that progresses them through the ranks from a young person, into a big world of professional boxing later on, where the white-collar will access it, I'd like to say fast-track it, it's not is it, it's a different essence. It's a different everything.

Rick could not quite articulate the 'different essence' of white-collar boxing in comparison to amateur boxing, though he notes the different time-scale is of importance here. Amateur boxing, arguably the first sport to undergo the process of modernisation (Boddy, 2008), has a long feel to it for Rick. Indeed, amateur and professional boxing can be understood on a continuum, and boxing can be understood as a career, through which a self is developed

through years of engagement (Chapter 3). By contrast it can be noted that white-collar boxing has a short feel to it. Indeed, as Urry (2009: 191) notes 'short-termism' is a characteristic of late modernity. Rick's immediate choice of words to describe white-collar boxing was 'fast-track' but he changed his mind on this. Rick was not contesting whether white-collar boxing is undertaken for a different duration than other forms of the sport. Rather the above can be read in the following way: the quantitative time difference in terms of engagement in white-collar boxing compared to amateur and professional boxing entails qualitative ontological difference. White-collar boxing draws upon and aims to reproduce the career of the boxer in idealised terms in a short time frame, but does not *per se* fast-track participants into the professional ranks.

The following statement can be understood to exemplify this theorisation too, though it is drawn upon here primarily to situate white-collar boxing at Shadcote in relation to white-collar boxing elsewhere (*i.e.* Trimbur, 2013, the context being NYC).

Rick: I think it's [white-collar boxing is] more accessible to everybody, I think if you wanted to have uh a fight, um, you would have a long process through the amateur game, you'd have to jump through a lot of hoops, [...] whereas you can sign up for an white-collar um, you can receive a level of training, and you can get into the experience, the experience of having a fight, um, y'know, very quickly. Not necessarily boxing of course, that's relative to the individual and how far they take it. But it certainly accesses them to a boxing environment with some basic boxing training in a safe manner, where they can experience the world of boxing.

For Trimbur (2013) white-collar boxing is an exclusive sport, in that it costs upwards of \$100 per training session (approximately £75). For Rick however, white-collar boxing is for everybody. This thesis will indicate that this is perhaps not the case on various counts, though in monetary terms white-collar boxing at Shadcote is far more accessible than white-collar boxing in NYC. White-collar boxing is advertised and understood by participants at Shadcote to be free in monetary terms. This provides an initial indication that at Shadcote the term white-collar does not have the same meaning as that in the USA, and this will be discussed further in the

following chapter. The political economy of white-collar boxing will now be further addressed to further examine this arrangement.

## **5.7 The Political Economy of White-Collar Boxing**

### **5.7.1 Situating White-Collar Boxing within the Wider Boxing Economy**

The following can to an extent be understood as a condensed history of Shadcote Boxing Club. It is undoubtedly a reconstruction, based on data created via interviews, primarily with the coaching staff. Engagement with their interview accounts allows for a recounting of the action through which Shadcote as an institution concerned with white-collar boxing came into being, and how white-collar boxing should be understood in relation to other forms of the sport.

#### **5.7.1.1 White-Collar Boxing, Recreational Boxing and Unlicensed Boxing**

Shadcote Boxing Club has existed for over 15 years, though has only been involved in white-collar boxing since 2006. Prior to 2006, Shadcote had entered fighters into unlicensed competition, both in boxing and in various other combat sports.

Rick: It started off being a mixed martial arts club really, we used to do children's classes, I used to do children's classes and used to have people help out I suppose, some fifteen, sixteen years ago, they were very very busy. Then we had adult classes at the weekend, more mixed martial arts and kickboxing and that, because it was more popular in the nineties, very very popular, and it proved very popular at Shadcote. Um, and Shadcote itself seemed to get a good name locally and that, and people used to want to send their children, or people wanted to be trained in the style of training that we did in those days, and then about eight, nine years ago, when the kickboxing element and that died out, um I wanted to take it back to the purity of boxing. Um, chose not to teach children, um anymore, cos of all the new regulations and this and that and the gym really wasn't geared for it, we

weren't in control of getting the gym secured into that element. Um, and then turned it into a purist gym, probably, about eight years ago I'd say, probably.

EW: Yeah. So, when you say a purist gym what do you mean by that?

Rick: Purist as in um going back to boxing in its roots. Um boxing was something I got into at a young age, um, wasn't very popular probably for the late eighties and nineties, with martial arts coming in, and martial arts was everywhere I think, commercially, so boxing wasn't popular, and as somebody who earned his living by teaching commercially um, I obviously follow trends and built Shadcote up around the trends that were running at the time.

Though Shadcote positions itself as an alternative to chain gyms, otherwise known as health clubs, it can be understood as emerging during the same period as the expansion of such institutions (Crossley, 2006) and operating according to the same market principles in terms of the commodification of fitness. Shadcote Boxing Club is a commercial enterprise, and can be understood as an institution produced by and producer of the marketisation and popularisation of recreational boxing (Chapter 2).

Following market trends, Shadcote provided training in various combat sports and martial arts. During the 1990s various fighting leagues promoting different forms of kickboxing and mixed martial arts emerged across the globe (the UFC being a well-known example) (*c.f.* van Bottenberg and Heilbron, 2006). Beyond providing reactional training in these fighting styles, Shadcote trained fighters in other combat sports for competition. The competitions into which Shadcote entered these fighters were unlicensed events and in this respect, the activities at Shadcote are not limited to recreation.

Reflecting on the meaning of the term unlicensed Rick noted that:

if it's not regulated by the ABA or the board, or the pro board it becomes unlicensed. So, whether it's kickboxing, boxing, mixed martial arts as it is now [...] see promoters are promoters, if they put a fight show on, um, not so much now, but certainly a year or two ago, on that show they would have two, three, four

disciplines. You could have wrestlin', kickboxing, [muay] Thai, boxing, um, y'know, so it's a bit of opening for promoters everywhere.

Such fights were unlicensed events outside of the regulation of any official body. Whilst those who participate in boxing at Shadcote are amateurs in that they are not paid professionals in the sport, they are not amateur boxers. Amateur in the boxing context has a more particular meaning than one who is not paid, and refers to amateur boxing as a specific form of the sport (Chapter 2). Shadcote, however, has had some involvement in amateur boxing on an informal basis, and this directly relates to how the club became involved in white-collar boxing.

#### **5.7.1.2 White-Collar Boxing and Amateur Boxing**

It should be briefly noted that some amateur boxing clubs enter boxers into unlicensed competition. This is against amateur boxing regulations, as it amounts to boxers amassing fight experience off official record, official records being that upon which amateur bouts are arranged. Shadcote had, prior to this research, periodically supplied fighters to amateur boxing clubs to compete in amateur bouts, whilst also competing in unlicensed boxing matches. This arrangement should not be overstated and was no longer in operation by the time this fieldwork was undertaken. However, this informal involvement in amateur boxing is directly relevant to how Shadcote became involved in white-collar boxing. As Rick explained:

'[in 2006, one of the club lads] said um 'there's this white-collar thing', he says 'I quite fancy having a go on one of them'. This lad [...] was taught by me, went to an ABA club, fought ABA [...] And he said 'I fancy doing one of them white-collars'... and I didn't know really what they were at the time, so found out a bit more about it, um, took him down, he won his first fight pretty comfortably, it was obvious that the standard was um, probably not, y'know, not the best um, came away and that was that, went back to feeding other fights here and there.'

Rick continues:

'the demand for people wanting to get involved more was kind of really taking hold by this point. So I said to this lad, 'the guy that

did that white-collar, y'know um, have you got his number?' He said, 'Yeah I'll get him to ring you'. So he rang me and I says, 'Look, we've got this club, seen your white-collar, seen what you're doing, um, we'd probably like to be involved a little bit more as a club' [...] and he said, 'Ah, yeah, great'.

The white-collar boxing undertaken by Shadcote at this stage did not follow an eight-week format. Rather, it involved club lads competing in neighbouring cities, where White-Collar Boxing Ltd promoted boxing events against fighters from other boxing clubs. Rick recalls:

We used to take teams of five or six fighters, then we used to normally go out to [neighbouring cities], or when he was at Redtown he'd [White-Collar Boxing Ltd owner] then ring me and say 'have you got some lads that can turn up and fight?' so we did that for a year or two [...] but the white-collar in Redtown didn't really take off [...]. So we went down to one [a white-collar show] in Redtown and he turned round and he says, 'I'm not gonna do Redtown anymore', he says, 'It's too much trouble, I'm not enjoyin' it'. So, I says, 'Fair enough, that's fine, if you want us to support your shows, let me know'. We were then supplying fighters for fights in other cities in the tens, like ten a fight, fifteen a fight, [...] the way the structure was, White-Collar Boxing Ltd was actually relying on us to provide the fighters, all the time, so um, which was great, we was, we certainly had the lads that wanted to fight, then we had a conversation and he said he would like to bring it back to Redtown, would we be interested in training and doing all the rest, and it's gone from strength to strength.

The return of White-Collar Boxing Ltd promotions to Redtown in 2008 marks a shift in the format of white-collar boxing undertaken by Shadcote. As will become further apparent in this chapter, white-collar boxing at Shadcote has a charitable dimension, and it is at this stage that this dimension was integrated. 'Running the training' can be understood to mean providing eight-week courses in boxing and organising fight nights, as opposed to supplying fighters for shows on an *ad hoc* basis, as Shadcote had done previously. With this shift a difference between white-collar boxing and other unlicensed boxing was also forged: whereas previously fighters from Shadcote competed against fighters from other boxing clubs, henceforth

Shadcote provided boxing camps wherein beginners could sign up to participate in a boxing match against another fighter also trained at Shadcote. This is a trait unique to white-collar boxing.

The intention of White-Collar Boxing Ltd may be to provide a white-collar boxing experience equivalent to that in the United States. For instance, during one introductory talk observed during this fieldwork, a clipped version of the history of white-collar boxing at Gleason's presented in Chapter 2 via Trimbur (2013) was articulated by the White-Collar Boxing Ltd representative. This is addressed further in Chapter 6. Whilst this might be the intention of White-Collar Boxing Ltd, white-collar boxing is however provided at Shadcote as it allows for participation in boxing outside of the control of the ABA:

EW: Okay, so [...] why aren't you affiliated with the ABA then?

Rick: 'Cos I don't want to be.

EW: Yeah?

Rick: Yep. Um, I don't want somebody to tell me what to do, I don't want somebody runnin' my club. I don't want somebody tellin' me who can fight and who can't, I don't want somebody tellin' me where we have to be next week. Um, I don't want somebody telling me who we can have and who we can't. [...] I don't want to be controlled by any form of body that I don't necessarily have a great deal of respect for, at all [...] They're [amateur boxing clubs] not in control of their own finances, not in control of their own business plans, they're not in control, they're not controlling their own club, where to go, when to go, how to go, they're completely dictated to. They're not in control of their own websites, they're not um... you, you work for somebody else [when you are affiliated with the ABA]. I've never worked for anybody and don't intend to start now.

The rejection of amateurism allows for further understanding of why Shadcote Boxing Club participate in white-collar boxing, and indeed what white-collar boxing is. White-collar boxing, in being an unlicensed form of the sport, lacks extensive regulation and an expansive administration. Shadcote is involved in white-collar boxing as it provides the means to engage in boxing independent of the regulation of amateur boxing



authorities, perceived to be over-bearing and impeding in the ability to be financially successful. Being involved in white-collar boxing allows for the continued existence of the boxing club whilst not being precluded from participation in the market.

This motivation differentiates white-collar boxing at Shadcote from white-collar boxing as it is theorised by Trimbur (2013). In Trimbur's research context amateurs, professional and white-collars train in the same gym. The latter are present at the gym to monetarily sustain amateur boxing, which is itself situated outside of the wider economy. Shadcote, however, focuses on white-collar boxing as a means of rejecting amateurism.

#### **5.7.1.3 White-Collar Boxing and Professional Boxing**

Whilst none of the club lads are professionals, Shadcote is informally involved in professional boxing. As Rick noted:

I might not be affiliated in the pro world, but [...] we have a few pros come down, don't we? [...] It tests the club, y'know, it says, 'Well what are we doing here, are we right?' and when you've got champions in the pro world and they're coming down and they want to be there, around our people and they like our people and they like what our people are putting out, it kind of shows that the club isn't far off the money in people's perceptions of what the club should be, but, over and above all, we're doing it our way. We're not following a rulebook or guidebook, or being told what to do. This is just what we do. We're comfortable with what we do, we're not bothered who comes down and has a look, we're not bothered with, y'know, who wants to look at what we're doing.

To an extent Rick regards the BBBofC in the same way as the ABA: an administrative apparatus that can be done without for its rulebooks and guidebooks. However, a couple of professional boxers do attend the boxing club, for the most part working as coaches, but also using the gym to train in addition to their usual boxing gyms. This is welcomed: professional boxing is widely understood as being the pinnacle of the sport and is 'massively profitable business' (Woodward, 2014: 15). Being a commercial gym, Rick rejects amateurism: the provision of amateur boxing has no commercial

value in itself, and this is ultimately the value system by which Shadcote operates. On the other hand, professional boxing is revered at Shadcote for these reasons. The presence of professional boxers is understood to make Shadcote culturally legitimate (Bourdieu, 1986) in the boxing sphere without divorcing itself from the market, as participation in amateur boxing would entail. Indeed, as Rick notes above, the involvement of pros at Shadcote indicates that the club is not 'far off the money'.

White-collar boxing can be further situated in relation to professional boxing, in that it aims to simulate the experience of a professional boxer. The introductory talk referred to earlier in this chapter, given to white-collar boxers by the representative of White-Collar Boxing Ltd serves as initial testament to this, but will be explored further at various junctures of this thesis. To an extent, Shadcote staff reject this reproduction, and disapprove of the larger-than-life ethos which White-Collar Boxing Ltd employ in their promotions, wishing to recreate the atmosphere of world-level professional boxing events. Simultaneously the inclusion of professional boxers among the coaching staff perpetuates this simulation. White-collars are recurrently reminded that they are training with and amongst professionals, adding to the white-collar boxing experience.

How Shadcote came to be involved in white-collar boxing is undoubtedly particular to Shadcote. However, there is a limited amount of evidence to suggest that this arrangement does resemble white collar-boxing in Britain more widely. For instance, another unlicensed promotion company with which Shadcote has had some involvement, but is based in a neighbouring city and hosts fights between many boxing clubs in and beyond the region, has now 'gone under the white-collar banner' (Rick, interview). As Rick noted, 'It's on the money, it's on the ball', meaning that 'there are many others that are popping up all over the place' (Rick, interview). Indeed, white-collar boxing, whilst presented publicly as free, is very much 'on the money' (Rick, interview).

### **5.7.2 White-Collar Boxing: A Philanthrocapitalist Arrangement**

Fitness philanthropy is a term that pertains to:

consumer-oriented philanthropic solutions to health or social problems that draw on physical activity-based events such as fun runs, bike rides, long swims, epic hikes and multi-sport

challenges in which participants seek to raise money for and awareness of a variety of causes (Palmer, 2016: 226)

To an extent, white-collar boxing can be added to the list of practices above. However, white-collar boxing, whilst appearing to be philanthropic, is an advanced philanthrocapitalist project. Philanthrocapitalism has been variously identified as an emergent market rationality (Bishop and Green, 2008; McGoey, 2012, 2014), in which philanthropy has been transformed into a 'lucrative industry' (McGoey, 2014: 111). White-collar boxing is presented as free in monetary terms to those undertaking it. As noted previously, tickets must be sold to participate, *and* money must be raised for charity. These two activities become blurred and it is understood by participants that tickets are sold *to* raise money for charity. This is not the case. Ticket sales amount to private revenue accumulated by White-Collar Boxing Ltd. White-Collar Boxing Ltd as an institution does not raise money for charity, and this is the responsibility of the individual white-collar boxer. That White-Collar Boxing Ltd places much emphasis on white-collar boxing being free and for charity obscures this arrangement: charity is commodified, but through this commodification it renders unclear that White-Collar Boxing Ltd is a profitable organisation.

Stipulations of participation are explained to white-collar boxers at the introductory meeting. As a reminder, the following is an excerpt from the introductory talk presented earlier in this chapter: 'All that is required of you is that you raise money for charity by setting up a *Just Giving* account, that you sell twenty tickets to your fight, and that you attend the allocated free training sessions' (adapted from fieldnotes). Likewise, the White-Collar Boxing Ltd website, through which white-collar boxers sign up to the programme, states that training is free and that white-collar boxing is for charity. Additionally, it is stated that 'training worth £300 is provided for free to facilitate charity fund-raising' (paraphrased). Though this is discussed further below, tickets cost on average £20 each.

For the presentation of information above participants understandably operate on the assumption that white-collar boxing is free. The following interview quotations exemplify this, in which two white-collar boxers reflect upon signing up:

Craig: 'Eight weeks' free trainin'. Know what I mean? Get a fight at the end of it. All made sense really'.

Anthony: 'I basically saw it on Facebook: eight weeks' free trainin'. And to start with I thought it was one of those things, the kind of crap you see on Facebook, but I looked [...] and that there was a meeting. So I went down to the meetin', found out it literally was eight weeks' free training, and if you dropped out nothing to lose, so I came down to it. I thought why not?'

As it is often said, however, there is no such thing as a free lunch, and elsewhere on the White-Collar Boxing Ltd website it is stated: 'participants must raise money for charity of their own accord. Money from ticket sales is used to pay for training and the final event and does not go to charity' (paraphrased). Although this is not entertained by anyone at Shadcote, in this respect white-collar boxers could hypothetically pay directly for 20 tickets themselves, thereby covering the cost of training and purchasing their access. In doing so, however, they would not raise any money for charity. Charity fundraising occurs via a parallel process to ticket sale – the raising of sponsorship via *Just Giving*.

White-collar boxers rather assume that the money raised through ticket sales is donated to the charity. The following extracts from interviews with Kelly and Oliver exemplify this:

EW: And err, obviously, you gotta sell a certain amount of tickets, to box on the night.

Kelly: Yep, yep.

EW: What do you think about that?

Kelly: Part of it, isn't it? It's all towards charity.

Oliver: Like I say, I've sold two tables plus ten tickets. Win or lose, hopefully win, I will've raised through ticket sales and sponsors about a grand and a half altogether I think. Which, I think, is a pretty good amount and like I say, it's for a good cause.

The recurrent emphasis on training being free and for the purposes of charity fundraising however, obscures that sale of tickets – notionally granting ticket-holders access to a product in the form of a boxing match – equates to purchasing access to the commodified experience of being a professional boxer. *Emphatically*, white-collar boxing is not free, the cost is rather

distributed amongst multiple buyers, of whom none are the white-collars themselves. In this respect, white-collar boxing is experienced as free at the point of participation. The inclusion of charity in the White-Collar Boxing Ltd programme makes it valuable, and at the same time obscures that value is accrued.

Via analysis of charitable organisations in Canada, Sweeney and Killoran-McKibbin (2016: 457) note that for marketing professionals: '[charitable] cause-related marketing campaigns themselves are and should be first and foremost a strategy for selling products, rather than an altruistic or philanthropic activity'. This statement resonates with white-collar boxing. Craig, for instance, reflecting on fundraising and ticket sales, noted that: 'the only fundraising I did was the tickets really' (Craig, interview). Craig raised no money for charity whilst presuming, like others, that he was doing so by selling tickets. This suggests that, fundamentally White-Collar Boxing Ltd is only concerned with selling product, and not with philanthropic causes, in that white-collar boxers can compete at a charity fight night without raising money for charity through separate sponsorship on the *Just Giving* site.

Whilst resonant with other philanthrocapitalist practices, this presents an advancement in philanthrocapitalism. Much philanthrocapitalist discussion focuses on the commercialisation of charity (Moore, 2008). Absent in the literature is commodification of charity itself, which is the case with white-collar boxing. The medical charity with which White-Collar Boxing Ltd are partnered, could be one such charity operating as a philanthrocapitalist organisation independently of their commodification by White-Collar Boxing Ltd. Here White-Collar Boxing Ltd have included charity in the model to make profit. In this respect, reflecting on the transition from unlicensed boxing to white-collar boxing, Rick noted that: 'I think that [white-collar boxing] would've ended if it had gone the other way, and we stuck with where we started which is why Redtown came to an end'. In other words, white-collar boxing became a successful phenomenon through the commodification of charity.

As regards the extract from Oliver, above: selling a table here refers to selling ten tickets which give access to a seat around a table at ringside. Table tickets cost more than standing tickets (those Oliver refers to as tickets) and can only be sold in groups of ten. The cost of a table is at a minimum £300 (£30 per ticket) and individual standing tickets cost a

minimum of £20. Taking these minimum figures, the amount of money Oliver raised through ticket sales was at least £800, which he presumed to be charitable donation, but which is revenue accumulated by White-Collar Boxing Ltd.

As stated on White-Collar Boxing Ltd's website, it costs £300 per person to cover the costs of the events and training which is paid for through ticket sales. Participants must sell a minimum of 20 tickets costing a minimum of £20 each. Revenue of £400 minimum is therefore produced by each white-collar boxer, and at least therefore £100 profit accumulated via each white-collar boxer. As Oliver's account suggests, in some instances this figure is more (in Oliver's case it would be at least £500). There are approximately 40 fighters per fight night, sometimes far more, each of whom are bound to sell tickets to participate. Shadcote Boxing Club is not the only boxing club with which White-Collar Boxing Ltd is involved. One fight night, taking the minimal figures of 40 fighters selling 20 standard tickets would entail approximately £16000 revenue and £4000 profit. White-collar boxers sell tickets for cash, and this cash is returned to White-Collar Boxing Ltd. Exactness of profit is therefore difficult to ascertain. This is irrelevant, however, when considering the social form that the above implies (commodified, commodifying, profitable *i.e.* philanthrocapitalist) compared to which White-Collar Boxing Ltd publicly presents itself (charitable, altruistic). Whilst charity fundraising is presented as the *raison d'être* of White-Collar Boxing Ltd, the above suggests that involvement in charity fundraising is a marketing strategy to promote ticket sales and accrue revenue.

Professional boxers are commodified in that they occupy the position of producer and product and from this product value is created/extracted (Chapter 3). For the above, it can be said that commodification also figures in white-collar boxing, but in various, less immediately obvious ways. The commodification of charity has been addressed above, but in addition to this it can be stated that professional boxing *as an institution* is commodified and sold on the experience economy. The white-collar boxer also occupies the position of consumer here, though in undertaking a reproduced, ersatz version of professional boxing is similarly commodified, in that value is extracted from their bodily work. The way in which White-Collar Boxing Ltd presents itself publicly, as providing free training, and being for charity, however, obscures that it is in any capacity a profitable organisation. As has

often been the case historically with monetary economy of boxing (see, for instance, Woodward 2014: 74-79) the white-collar boxing monetary economy is somewhat murky (though this is not to say illegal). The economic arrangement described above is undoubtedly simplified, but it indicates that there is an economic arrangement underpinning white-collar boxing unrealised by its practitioners.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to introduce the primary research site, Shadcote Boxing Club. It introduced in rich, descriptive terms that Shadcote is ordered according to class, nationality, race and gender. It indicated that white-collar boxing is a different phenomenon to that discussed by Trimbur (2013), the only other extant account of white-collar boxing. White-collar boxing can here be understood as a form of unlicensed boxing, undertaken outside of the regulation of any boxing authority. Indeed, this is what makes it attractive to the coaches at Shadcote. White-collar boxing provides an opportunity for participation in the sport, whilst being able to reject that which is perceived as authoritarian about amateur boxing. It is a commercial form of the sport, operating within the mainstream monetary economy, similar to other branches of the fitness industry. Whilst professionalised, however, it is not professional boxing. Its relationship to professional boxing is one of simulation; it reproduces the professional boxing career as a short-term, eight-week tourist experience to be consumed.

Unlike other white-collar boxing organisations wherein the cost of participation is directly paid for by the white-collar boxer, White-Collar Boxing Ltd have constructed a model through which participation in training and fight night is paid-for, and from which profit is extracted, but in such a way that it is not immediately clear that any payment or profit has at all been made. In summary, participation in the course is presented by White-Collar Boxing Ltd as being free and for the purposes of charity fundraising. Cost of participation is divided between those who buy tickets for fight night. By constructing participation as free, and the events being for charity, it is not realised by white-collar boxers that this is the purpose of ticket sales. Charity is commodified, and for this reason white-collar boxing can be understood as a philanthrocapitalist project. The total ticket sales that participants are required to make more than covers the cost of participation,

and White-Collar Boxing Ltd thereby accumulates revenue and makes its profit. Ultimately, this arrangement obscures that White-Collar Boxing Ltd have commodified the experience of boxing, and extract value from white-collar boxers through their participation. The white-collar boxer can be simultaneously understood as consumer, producer and product.



## **6. On White-Collar Boxing and Social Class**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter probes the meaning of the term white-collar in the context of white-collar boxing at Shadcote. Principally, and in various ways, it suggests that the term is misleading. The term historically can be taken to mean middle class and to signify office work (Mills, 2002). In the context of boxing the term has hitherto been understood to mean approximately this, though the term also extends beyond this meaning to cover boxing undertaken by an upper-class elite (Trimbur, 2013; Woodward, 2014). At Shadcote, the term does not accurately signify the social class of practitioner, or their modes of employment. Notably, many participants did not understand the term to be a signifier of social class, and those who did rejected this meaning as appropriate to the Shadcote context. A class analysis is presented, which engages with data collected via the questionnaire discussed in Chapter 4. Overall, these data are limited, but can be taken to actively suggest that the social class of white-collars at Shadcote does not reflect the social class of white-collar boxers at Gleason's. Beyond these limited data, interview narratives pertaining to employment are analysed to further suggest this. This is not to say, however, that all participants are of the same class position, and interview data suggest that white-collar boxers at Shadcote can be located across various class positions. How and why this version of the sport came to be known as white-collar boxing, given it is a misleading name, is also addressed. Finally, it is argued that the experience of white-collar boxing is plural, and this plurality can be drawn upon the lines of social class. White-collar boxing is consumed by actors from multiple class positions, which problematises, but does not negate Bourdieu's theory on class and taste. Whilst white-collar boxing is a late-modern experience, it does not follow that identity is individualistically constructed therein through its consumption. Rather, this thesis argues that class identity informs the qualitative experience of consumption itself.

### **6.2 The Meaning of White-Collar at Shadcote**

Meanings are intersubjectively constructed and reproduced (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Engaging with the meanings of the term white-collar as

understood by participants allows for an understanding of what white-collar boxing is from their perspectives. As discussed above, in the context of white-collar boxing elsewhere the term is deliberately employed as a means of identifying the social class of participants (Trimbur, 2013) as the term white-collar is most often used outside the boxing context too (Mills, 2002; Agnew *et al.*, 2009). Through such analysis therefore an answer to how social class orders practice in the sport can also be addressed.

This section presents a thematic analysis of interview participants' understandings of the term white-collar, particularly in response to variations of the question: 'So, the term white-collar, what does that mean to you?' (EW, interview). The themes are as follows: *knew the history of white-collar boxing; knew the meaning of the term as regards employment; related to fight night dress code; related to eight-week boxing format; did not know the meaning of the term*. Those participants whose answers relate to the first two of these themes rejected these understandings as applicable to white-collar boxing at Shadcote. That is, such responses can be taken to suggest that white-collar boxing is misleadingly named in this context.

Four interview participants for this study knew in some capacity of the historical roots of white-collar boxing summarised in Chapter 2, and as presented at length by Trimbur (2013). For example:

'Um, well, when I signed up to white-collar I did a little bit of research on it and like I found that um it was back for when what was it, doctors and lawyers 'n'all that used to set up these kind of events, so I assumed white-collar is just meant to be like, not working class...' (Isaac, interview).

'it's from the two guys in America who sort of started it up' (Lucy, interview).

A further four participants understood the term white-collar to relate to 'office work' as opposed to 'manual work', without articulating anything specifically to do with the history of white-collar boxing:

Mark: I think I thought of it differently when I first started, cos I don't know, I thought white-collar would sort of be people in your offices or I dunno, people in your admin jobs, customer service jobs, that maybe hadn't boxed before, um yeah, that sort of background, but I don't think it really is that, from what I've seen

now, because people are from all different backgrounds, so your construction industry and so forth.

EW: So, white-collar, in every day kind of speak, outside of boxing, do you know what that means?

Jez: People who work in an office, int it?

EW: Yeah

Jez: Yeah, I'm more of a blue-collar [...] Like manual trade.

All participants indicated above, who did know something about the history of white-collar boxing, or understood the term white-collar as having class and employment connotations, recognised that the it does not accurately represent the phenomenon in this context. For instance, Jez continued to note that: 'I'd say [...] the majority are blue collars'.

Largely, however, participants did not know that white-collar boxing began exclusively for elite members of society, or that its practitioners are presumed to be in certain forms of employment and of certain social class relatedly. Many white-collar boxers at Shadcote rather understand white-collar to relate to the dress code for fight night, and/or the temporal format of the white-collar boxing programme. Beyond this, some participants did not know what the term meant in any capacity.

As explained in the previous chapter, the dress code for fight night is very smart, on many occasions black tie. Five participants understood the term white-collar to relate to the dress code for events, which for men includes a white, collared shirt:

Oliver: Um I didn't know to start with, to be honest, but I just assumed it's to do with like the dress code and stuff when you go, because it's for charity they want smart shirts and stuff, that's what I assumed. But if I'm honest I'm not a hundred per cent.

Furthermore, seven participants did not understand the term to signify anything beyond a boxing training programme wherein beginners undergo a short period of training and then compete in a boxing match (Chapter 5):

Gary: Well, there's different aspects to that question, but, in terms of the boxing side of things um, for me, it is what it states,

so it's for people that haven't boxed before with limited experience to go through an eight-week training programme and then to have a boxing bout at the end of it, whilst raising money at the same time.

EW: Yeah. And then in everyday life, outside of boxing?

Gary: So, it's not really a term that has come up in my social group really. I'd imagine um, if I was to associate it with something, I'd associate it with boxing here, so white-collar, to me would be something, when somebody is fairly new at something.

Eight participants articulated that in some capacity they did not know what the term white-collar meant, and had never heard the term used prior to signing for the white-collar boxing programme. Perhaps the most obvious example of this type of response is as follows:

EW: And the term, white-collar, what does it mean to you?

Ash: You want me to be honest?

EW: Yeah.

Ash: I haven't got a clue.

At points, in interviews, I tried to discuss with such participants that the term white-collar is used to signify a type of employment, for instance, distinguished from blue collar, and that that is from where the term originates. However, the term for some was so detached from its historical meaning that it was difficult, without being patronising, to discuss it as a term significant to the world outside of boxing at Shadcote:

EW: So, the term white-collar, in kind of everyday life, outside of boxing, do you know what it means?

Anthony: Um, it's just beneath your genuine, regular amateurs.

EW: I mean outside of the boxing world, what the term white-collar means.

Anthony: I didn't know the term until I started boxing.

EW: It's kind of an American term, it's like the opposite of blue-collar.

Anthony: yeah.

EW: so, do you know what *that* means?

Anthony: I mean, I know roughly now I've started boxing, so before I started boxing I didn't know.

EW: right, so, outside of boxing, what do you think white-collar means then?

Anthony: now, I see it as an introduction to boxing, so like, people that do their eight weeks, it's below amateur, so you've got the proper head guards, you've got really big sixteen-ounce gloves, it's the safest the sport gets.

The interview extract above from Anthony provides a clear indication that the term white-collar is divorced from its meaning in terms of social class in general, and in terms of the class-based practice of white-collar boxing as it is practised at Gleason's. Rather, white-collar boxing at Shadcote is understood by participants to relate to the dress code for fight night, and to the temporal format this version of the sport entails: an eight-week introductory course in boxing.

Crucially, both the lack of understanding of what the term white-collar is generally taken to signify, and rejection of this commonplace understanding of the term by those who understand it, signal to difference between white-collar boxing at Shadcote and the white-collar boxing studied by Trimbur (2013). Unlike the American case, where the term white-collar is employed deliberately to signify the 'upper-middle' and 'upper class' (Trimbur, 2013: 118) of practitioners, this is not the case in the Shadcote context. Elsewhere theorised briefly and from afar (Trimbur, 2013; Woodward, 2014), this was however presumed to be the case up until now in the British context. Through engaging with how white-collar boxers understand the term white-collar, however, it becomes apparent that it is not. Clearly, Shadcote is but one of many boxing clubs engaged in white-collar boxing in Britain, and it would be imprudent to generalise this small-scale qualitative research finding to the British context. It does however indicate that the current, limited knowledge of white-collar boxing in Britain does not account for the diverse empirical reality of the sport.

The term white-collar here has different socially constructed meanings, all of which are separated from what the term traditionally means in a general context and in the historical context of white-collar boxing. The lack of understanding of white-collar as a signifier of class does not imply that social

class no longer figures in various ways in the gym. Nor does this lack of understanding imply that all white-collar boxers involved in this study are, for instance, working class. The following section thus addresses in further detail the social class of white-collar boxers.

### **6.3 Social Class of White-Collar Boxers**

Various interview extracts presented above and in the previous chapter provide indications that the term white-collar does not accurately reflect the class position of white-collar boxers. In the previous section, Jez, for instance, articulated that he was 'blue-collar' as opposed to white-collar. This section addresses this notion in greater detail, suggesting that white-collar boxers can be located at various class positions, with some white-collar boxers occupying positions in social space far from those in Trimbur's account. Unlike white-collar boxing elsewhere therefore a condition of participation is not being part of 'the economic elite' (Trimbur, 2013: 140).

#### **6.3.1 Positioning White-Collar Boxers in Social Space**

For Dorling (2014: 453) 'social class in Britain is clearly no longer neatly defined by occupation'. Savage *et al.* (2013) expand upon this, arguing that contemporarily there are overrepresentations of various jobs in various class strata, and that some people with 'white-collar' jobs could well belong to lower class strata than those with 'blue-collar' jobs. Simply asking *are white-collar boxers white-collar workers?* or a question to that effect as a means of investigating the social class of white-collar boxers would be mistaken. It is essentially for this reason that Bourdieu's model of social class is employed in this research: it is not reliant on positioning in relation to the means of production.

Atkinson and Rosenlund (2014: 22) note that 'qualitative researchers looking for a way to place respondents' in a class schema to 'make sense of practice' is a 'perennial problem'. A questionnaire pertaining to objective capital stocks, drawing upon Atkinson and Rosenlund (2014) and Atkinson (2010) was implemented (both of which work in a Bourdieusian understanding of class), hoping to bridge this gap. As discussed in Chapter 4, in hindsight these data are severely limited. However, results can be used to suggest that white-collar boxers at Shadcote cannot be understood to

occupy the same, or similar social space as white-collar boxers elsewhere, which has hitherto been the suggestion in existing literature (Trimbur, 2013; Woodward, 2014).

Atkinson and Roselund (2014: 23) note that qualitative class researchers:

'really must collect and present to readers as much information as is feasible on capitals and trajectory of participants – at least income, education and parents' education and job (as a rough surrogate for income), but also grandparents' positions and partner's income and education if possible – if they are to be positioned as accurately as possible and their practices more fully comprehended'.

Though Atkinson (2010) also includes housing status as an indicator of economic capital, and does not include grandparents' occupation, this also reflects the approach taken by Atkinson (2010). To note, Atkinson's scholarship and framework was drawn upon here as it is not only concerned with social class in late modernity, but questioning the existence of the process and condition of individualization (*e.g.* Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2001), which is of interest to this study.

This research does not, however, directly reflect the approach outlined in the quotation above; indeed, Atkinson and Roselund (2014: 22) intend qualitative researchers 'not to rely too much' on their directions, recognising the perennial difficulties of analysing class at the level of social space via qualitative research. Being not only about social class, but various inequalities, in the context of white-collar boxing, which to some extent form the core interest of the thesis, this research could not afford to collect and analyse data pertaining to all of the above as measures of capital. Moreover, it would have been unethical to do so. With a small sample size, collecting such data, which is to some extent unique to individual participants (*e.g.* occupations of significant others, across multiple generations) would make identifiable to participants themselves or others some private and potentially sensitive elements of their lives, and the lives of people not involved in this study. Rather: income, housing status, occupation and education were taken as measures of economic and cultural capital. Results are described below, to suggest white-collar boxers do not occupy the same social space as those white-collar boxers at Gleason's. These figures, presented below, include data from those 26 participants out of the 32 total interview participants

who provided all information required. Other interview participants were not included because they are not white-collar boxers e.g. Shadcote staff.

Atkinson and Roselund (2014) take educational qualifications as an indicator of cultural capital, which they rank in the following way: Higher Education; Higher Vocational Qualification; A level; GCSEs; No Qualifications. Those with a higher education qualification can be understood to have greater cultural capital than those with no qualifications. This is an incomplete, though often-utilised measure of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Data were collected in relation to this schema: four interview participants held a Higher Education Qualification; zero held a Higher Vocational Qualification; six interview participants had A level qualifications or equivalent; 14 participants had GCSEs or equivalent; and two participants had no formal qualifications.

In terms of economic capital, data were collected on income and housing status. This is an incomplete account of economic capital, primarily as it does not address accumulated wealth, savings, income of significant others, and dependants. In many studies income is taken as sole indicator of economic capital (Savage *et al.* 2013), and as this research has a small sample size, it was deemed too intrusive to gather data on these aspects of economic capital. Research that accounts for these aspects of economic capital often has a large sample, and does not discuss in depth the lived experience of participants, making connections between capital stocks and life history in qualitative terms. Had data been collected and drawn upon in these terms, participants would have been rendered identifiable.

Data on economic capital suggest the following: 17 earn under the national average (£27,200) (ONS, 2014), four earn approximately the national average, and five earn over the national average. 16 lived in rented accommodation; 7 owned their homes; 3 lived with parents. Of the three who lived with parents, perhaps expectedly, they were on the younger side of the age range of participants (which was approximately 20-50 years old). Though these participants lived with parents the following clarifications should be made: one participant was the primary payer of rent in the household, and another participant had until recently rented, though after splitting up with their partner had temporarily moved into their parents' house.



A measurement of social capital is missing from this research. This is sometimes measured through assessing the quantity and quality of social connections actors have (*e.g.* Savage *et al.*, 2013). This study, in not being entirely about class, but about the lived experience of white-collar boxing with reference to identities along various intersections, could not afford to formally collect and analyse such data, which is not without substantial methodological flaws anyway (Skeggs, 2015; Silva, 2015). Atkinson (2010) measures social capital partly through assessing parents' occupations. It had been hoped that this study would be able to measure social capital in this way, but data here are incomplete to such a degree that it is not worth drawing upon. Multiple participants did not indicate their parents' occupations at all, noted that their parents were deceased or retired, or described their jobs in such a way that it is unclear as to what job they actually have – for instance 'NHS'. To note, this is a fault of the methodological approach, not the participants.

Whilst these data are limited, they can be taken to suggest that in terms of position in social space, that is in terms of capital stocks in various forms, the social classes of white-collar boxers at Shadcote and at Gleason's differ. Mapped loosely onto a contemporary class schema – the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) – Trimbur's white-collar participants could arguably be understood as members of the elite: 'the most advantaged and privileged... characterised by having the highest levels of every form of capital' (Savage *et al.*, 2013: 233). This is figurative, not least given that Trimbur's context is NYC, which is not in Britain. Nonetheless, in being Wall Street Bankers, lawyers, and celebrities, white-collar boxers at Gleason's can be understood as prime beneficiaries of advanced capitalism. To use a popular term that also has some academic usage, they may be understood as the 'one per cent' (Keister, 2014). Indeed, one participant in Trimbur's study – Aaron – contemplated earning '\$4 billion' (Trimbur, 2013: 138), which equates to approximately £3 billion, and was chauffeur-driven in a Rolls-Royce. Other white-collar boxers in NYC 'earned salaries of millions of dollars' (Trimbur, 2013: 176).

On the other hand, some white-collar boxers at Shadcote could loosely be understood as members of 'the precariat', an emergent social class under neoliberalism characterised by 'very low amounts of all the kinds of capital' (Savage *et al.* 2015: 333) and 'high amounts of insecurity' (Savage *et al.* 2013: 243). The data presented above do not immediately indicate this,

though interview extracts in the following section indicate job insecurity. Moreover, of the 17 participants who earned below national average, four earned below £15,000 and one earned below £10,000. These participants live in rented accommodation, and had few, if any educational qualifications. To be clear, the precariat as a concept is of only limited use to this thesis. Participants did not, for instance, themselves articulate belonging to the precariat *per se* (as was the case in the GBCS too). However, that this analogy can even be attempted should provide evidence that the social class of participants involved in white-collar boxing at Shadcote differs from the white-collar boxing elsewhere: the category is here used to illustrate in the clearest possible terms that the class position of white-collar boxers at Shadcote and that in NYC are disparate.

Beyond this, however, and as has been suggested above, analysis of objective capital stocks is limited. These data were worth drawing upon, and can be taken to suggest that white-collar boxers at Shadcote are not of the same social class as white-collar boxers at Gleason's. This is important to note, as the suggestion has hitherto been that in every case white-collar boxers are 'city bankers, modern aristocrats and young professionals' (Woodward, 2014: 61) with 'significant means' who can afford to pay 'substantial amounts of money for their training' (Trimbur, 2013: xviii). The above suggests that this is not the case at Shadcote. Indeed, as discussed Chapter 5, white-collar boxing in this context is free at the point of consumption, meaning there is little immediate exclusionary economic barrier to participation (though Chapter 5 also suggests the cost for participation is distributed between tickets, meaning overall that it is not free).

To be clear, the above data were sought to provide a bearing on the positions of participants within social space as a means of comparing white-collar boxing at Shadcote with white-collar boxing at Gleason's, and more widely in relation to the term white-collar (*e.g.* Mills, 2002). It is the view here that many ethnographies of class do not make any attempt to do this, which thereby limits the utility of the scholarship. It is understandable, however, that this is the case, given that as Skeggs (1997: 10) notes, such analyses 'ultimately code behaviour in a cold and mechanical classificatory manner'. Similarly, Savage *et al.* (2015: 375-376) note, highlighting a weakness of the GBCS: 'to really get at how class is hardwired into people's identities you need to go further than just asking a tick-box question about which class

you identify with'. The wider point to which this quotation pertains is that lifestyle in relation to capital stocks is not addressed by reductive analysis of capital stocks at the level of social space (Bradley, 2014; Skeggs, 2015). Qualitative research on social class, however, does address this (e.g. McKenzie, 2015; Skeggs, 1997).

To give concrete examples of what is meant here, a participant who owned their home, earned above national average and held a Higher Education qualification noted in interview that:

'I was born in Redtown, grew up in Redtown, uh, very working-class family, um, first person out of my family to go to university, um probably first person out of my family to finish school if I'm honest.... not many, not a lot of people did'.

Similarly, another participant, whose declared personal income is below national average, but who owns his home and a small business making bespoke conservatories noted that:

'At sixteen I went in the navy for a bit, I was there one year [...] Once I come out the navy, I did a few jobs, needed work. Went to a factory, asked for a job, worked there for eight years, started at the bottom sweeping floors, ended up being in charge of things. The owner of that wanted the business shut... so I set one up on me own, cos I liked what I was doin' [manufacturing bespoke conservatory fittings]'

These qualitative accounts provide insight into the lived experience of social class in a way that survey data cannot. Both participants, in terms of objective capital stocks, are higher by one or more measure than many of the participants in this study. Both are arguably 'upwardly mobile' (Savage *et al.* 2015: 208) in terms of objective class position. Class is however embodied. Habitus, the embodiment of capital, through which sense is made of the world, whilst not inert is sedimentary (Wacquant, 2011); it is not amenable to instantaneous reformulation. The first of these participants states directly they are from a 'working class family' and their university education is discussed in relation to this background. Henceforth, interview data are therefore discussed, which give a richer description of the social class of white-collar boxers at Shadcote, which does not rely on analysis of capitals.

### 6.3.2 Qualitative Indicators of Social Class

Discussing class via qualitative data requires a presentation of various facets of participants' lives in rich or deep terms, and doing so risks rendering participants identifiable. Therefore, identifying features such as particular employment details are removed, and dates may be altered.

Some participants in this approximate category included for instance:

Nev, works as a 'dogsbody' (Nev, interview); a 'jack of all trades, master of none', he does 'a lot of maintenance work' (Nev, interview). He explained further that: 'unfortunately I've had m' hours cut so it's on a part time basis now'.

Jez: a driver, who came into the job, as he explained, because he was:

'kicked out of school... and obviously from then it was like in and out of jobs, just doing that, and then obviously when I stuck to drivin' and liked it, that's when I started staying in one company and then obviously this company I'm with now, I've been there seven years now'.

Craig: a warehouse operative, who had: 'been there four years, a year and a half was on agency, and then two years on their books...prior to that [...] various temporary contracts through agencies'

Ash works '[in horticulture] on an industrial level' and 'has for about nine months'. Ash explained further that he 'used to work there before' but 'got laid off'. Between these two employments, Ash worked as 'a picker in a warehouse', in an engineering plant, and 'at a post place'.

Al:

'...went to school 'til I was 16, then I left there and started an apprenticeship. Lasted about 5 month at that, then I went and worked [...] for about three years as a technician. Left that, became a plumber for six years'.

Oliver:

'worked in [in retail] for about five years [...] the shop shut down [...] then I just jumped on an agency [...] for about four, five months [...] and I got laid off from that... so I sort of stumbled into the warehouse really, it was, I had to get a job 'cos I got laid off'.

Jack: a welder and sheet metal worker, who works night shifts, and was previously a cleaner.

Ryan: a delivery worker, who had previously been made redundant from what 'wasn't a great job' (Ryan, interview) and who had prior to that worked elsewhere 'on minimum wage' (Ryan, interview).

Robert:

'I've got a busy life, I work nights, I've got six children [...]. Um, I'm a supervisor [in the hospitality industry] [...] so I've not got a lot of time for physical activity, I spend most of the time either asleep or at work.'

In less mechanical terms than the survey data above, these examples suggest that the class position of some white-collar boxers at Shadcote does not reflect the class position of white-collar boxers in NYC and London. There are recurring themes of job instability and low-paid work, which more closely, though this is not necessarily to say directly, reflect the economic reality of amateur boxers than it does white-collar at Gleason's Gym.

In contrast to the above, some participants can be understood more readily as 'dominant' (Bourdieu, 2010: 212) positions in social space. The sample for this study overall being opportunistic, and information pertaining to any aspect of participants' lives prior to interview – other than that they were involved in white-collar boxing – was for the most part unknown. The proportion of such participants at Shadcote therefore cannot be declared. However, this 'socially dominant' group of participants is underrepresented in the opportunistic sample, which may indicate that there are fewer participants from this group present at Shadcote.

Richard is university educated and owns more than one business. One of these he runs primarily as a hobby. He owns land, as well as his house, and earns over £40,000 a year.

Maude described herself in interview as 'a proper country girl' (interview quotation). She went to private school and noted that she 'was pretty fortunate, I had a good education, and when I was 18 I had the option of going to university' (interview quotation). Maude has travelled, during which time she undertook a postgraduate qualification.

Saul is studying for a university degree. His personal earnings are low (below £10,000), but he is supported financially by his parents, who are managers of multinational corporations. Unlike most in this study, who did not discuss politics at all in interview, Saul overtly described his political position in interview as 'very right-wing' (Saul, interview) whilst reflecting on the charitable dimension of white-collar boxing. He perceives this as good because he does not believe in state intervention or support.

These participants, whilst not identical to each other in terms of their capital stocks and class position relatedly, can all be characterised by having somewhat higher stocks of one or more forms of capital, and relatedly different lifestyles and tastes to those aforementioned with low capital stocks, as will become further apparent in section 6.4.

From all the above, it can be stated that the term white-collar is a misnomer in the context of white-collar boxing at Shadcote. This is not to say that all white-collar boxers occupy the same position in social space, or are of the same social class. Extending upon Chapter 5, it suggests that white-collar boxing at Shadcote is a qualitatively different phenomenon from white-collar boxing as it is practised at Gleason's boxing gym in NYC. White-collar boxing as a term and as a practice originated at Gleason's, wherein wall street bankers, celebrities, and other elite actors who often earn millions of dollars a year, and pay thousands of dollars a year to participate (Trimbur, 2013). The term was therefore deliberately created as to differentiate its practitioners from amateur and professional boxers along the lines of social class. This is not the case at Shadcote. White-collar boxing is free at the point of participation (though analysis in Chapter 5 complicates this). All this however raises an important and previously unaddressed question: why is white-collar boxing at Shadcote called white-collar boxing?

### **6.3.3 Why is White-Collar Boxing called White-Collar Boxing?**

From the above it can be stated that white-collar boxing does not necessarily entail white-collar workers boxing. If this seems counter to common sense (*e.g.* the title says white-collar, so it must be white-collar workers) it is perhaps because it is. Indeed, sociology is concerned with questioning common sense (Bauman and May, 2001; Bourdieu, 1977a). As a reminder, the *leitmotif* for this thesis is that in social life 'things are not what they seem' (Berger, 1963: 34). Once understood that the term white-collar boxing, like all language, is not utterly fixed in its meaning, and the same term can come to have specialised meanings in specific fields or contexts, then this problem disappears.

How exactly this form of unlicensed boxing came to be known as white-collar boxing, given that its title is in this context misleading is not exactly clear from this research. Unlike Gleason's Gym, Trimbur's research site, which is identifiable as the original source of the term, and refers therein to a type of boxing in which celebrities and bankers participate, Shadcote is not the original source of the eight-week, 'free' training model. As the previous chapter described, Shadcote became involved with White-Collar Boxing Ltd, who were already operating in several locations. Moreover, White-Collar Boxing Ltd was not the first white-collar boxing company in Britain to operate according to this model. Where this model originates is unclear, though it is certainly not with Shadcote. In being a form of unlicensed boxing, it is difficult to trace as there is no central body that maintains records (Hotten, 1998). There is no narrative, beyond that pertaining to Gleason's and in a context specific to Britain through which the origin of this form of white-collar boxing can be traced. However, a limited amount of ethnographic and interview data was yielded through this study which can contribute to an explanation of how this mis-signification became a constructed reality.

The two forms of boxing called white-collar – distinguishable along the lines of social class – are ultimately related. The form with which Shadcote is engaged via White-Collar Boxing Ltd draws upon the history of white-collar boxing at Gleason's in its promotional material. It may be that White-Collar Boxing Ltd ultimately would prefer it if their white-collar boxing programmes were exclusively undertaken by clientele equivalent in terms of class position to that of Gleason's. Informal conversations I had during fieldwork suggest this: after the introductory talk, for instance, one of the White-Collar Boxing Ltd representatives discussed with me – and essentially drawing upon the

narrative of the 'feckless poor' (c.f. Murray, 1990) - that financially successful people were their target market, since 'winners in life are winners in the ring' (fieldnotes, paraphrased).

Further data indicating this is as follows. White-collar boxing fight nights have strict dress codes: it is formal, and officially black tie (Chapter 5). This is set by White-Collar Boxing Ltd. Reflecting on when Shadcote first became involved with White-Collar Boxing Ltd, Rick noted:

'They [White-Collar Boxing Ltd] were definitely on with the beautiful people thing in the early days, so they had professional photographers taking pictures of the girls in nice cocktail dresses and the young, youngish lads in their suits and you very rarely saw any of the Shadcote lads or Shadcote staff in those photos, in their black t-shirts, tattoos and shaven heads. Because that was the image that they wanted to portray'.

For DeMello (2014: 158) 'the body has class inscribed on it' and the statements above from Rick indicates that White-Collar Boxing Ltd sought to remove bodies inscribed as working class from its public image. For instance, 'the beautiful people', by which Rick means the crowds at fight night clad in suits and cocktail dresses - signifiers of upper class - are those whom White-Collar Boxing Ltd wanted at their events. DeMello (2014) also notes that gender and race are inscribed on the body. Data pertaining to the scenario above is limited, but tentatively suggests stigmatisation within white-collar boxing at the intersection of class, gender and race - a construction of white, working-class men as disgusting - and ultimately a bid by White-Collar Boxing Ltd to organise events that present as in line with the original meaning of the term white-collar boxing, an exclusive and exclusionary practice.

From the above, it might be concluded that white-collar boxing as practised at Shadcote is ultimately adapted from that conducted first in New York, and then in other metropolises such as London and Tokyo (Trimbur, 2013), though that somewhere, post-transnationalisation of the term, it became endowed with new meanings and signified practices other than that conducted at Gleason's. As it was occasionally noted by the coaching staff, white-collar boxing organisations in London 'have a completely different way of doing things' (fieldnotes, paraphrased), meaning that the phenomena are qualitatively different whilst sharing the same name.



Unlicensed boxing is illegal in NYC, though it is not in any of the jurisdictions in the United Kingdom. This is, however, what the term unlicensed is sometimes understood to mean (Sugden, 1996). It might be, therefore, that white-collar is replacing the term unlicensed in contemporary boxing lexicon. This may be for the following reasons: being unlicensed not just in form but by name arguably presents as lacking legitimate cultural capital: recognition by official boxing bodies (e.g. AIBA, BBBofC), for instance, amounts to 'institutionalized capital'; a form of cultural capital 'presumed to guarantee' value (Bourdieu, 1986: 47). The term unlicensed overtly states this lack, whereas the term white-collar does not. Given its class connotations, and that it cannot be understood as to mean illegal or dangerous, the term white-collar might be understood as more respectable than unlicensed boxing, even if, in practice, the phenomena may be the same. Ultimately, as discussed in the previous chapter, this makes the sport more marketable, and therefore more widely consumed.

#### **6.4 The Plurality of the White-Collar Boxing Consumption Experience**

Bourdieu (2010: 212) notes that boxing combines 'features which repel the dominant class... the values and virtues demanded, strength, endurance, violence, 'sacrifice', docility and submission to collective discipline – so contrary to bourgeois role distance'. This is one example of the wider discussion held in *Distinction*, in which Bourdieu argues at length that different tastes in myriad aspects of culture, for instance sport, food, music, art, literature and cinema, 'can be attributed to different classes... shaped between the education system and the occupational structure' (Bennett, in Bourdieu 2010: xxii). Those shorn of capital in a 'necessary way' (Bourdieu, 2010: 95) value the more physically immediate. On the other hand, Bourdieu argues that those with plentiful capital can afford to value commodities for abstract reasons: 'form rather than function' (Bourdieu, 2010: xxvi) being the reason for consumption.

Bourdieu continues, however, that this relationship should not be understood as immutable:

'at different times... the same practices have been able to attract aristocratic or popular devotees' and that this 'should warn us against the temptation of trying to explain the class distribution

of sports purely in terms of the 'nature' of the various activities' (Bourdieu, 2010: 212).

Amateur boxing was established as a practice by the Marquis of Queensberry, and undertaken by upper and middle-class actors (Rhodes, 2011), however participation shifted in terms of social class – a result of industrialisation, urbanisation and the regulation of time (Boddy, 2008) – and has for the most part been understood as a working-class sport (Woodward, 2014). White-collar boxing in its origins, as its name implies, entails a form of the sport exclusively undertaken by elite actors, and white-collar boxing at Gleason's entails the consumption of commodified working-class identity (Chapter 2).

White-collar boxing in this thesis has thus far been theorised as an advanced capitalist project, wherein the professional boxing experience is commodified and consumed as a short-term experience. For this reason, white-collar boxing at Shadcote has been theorised as a late or liquid modern (Bauman, 2000; Urry, 2009) form of the sport. Beyond this, findings presented in this chapter indicate that white-collar boxing at Shadcote is simultaneously undertaken by actors from different class positions. Bauman notes that in first modernity '[c]lass allocation, though formed and negotiable rather than simply inherited or 'born into'... was 'solid, unalterable and resistant to individual manipulation' (Bauman, in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1999: xvi). For Bauman, however, "modernity mark two", the consumers' modernity' (2005: 26) 'does not recognise class distinctions' (Bauman, 2007: 55). Under this (presumed) condition, characterised by 'individualisation' (Bauman, 2000: 31), identity has become an active project, to be constantly be reformulated through consumption (Bauman, 2013b). For all the above, therefore, it might seem an obvious conclusion to draw, following Bauman, that social class has ceased to be a guiding principle of interaction – white-collar boxing being an example of this – and that ultimately Bourdieu's classic statement on the relationship between class and taste ceases to have purchase for boxing.

Bauman's sociology is not empirically-driven, in the formal scientific sense of the term (Blackshaw, 2005). This is not necessarily entirely problematic. However, such a grand approach to theorisation does not involve engagement with rigorously-collected empirical data, and for this Bauman has been criticised (Kilminster, 2017). As Rattansi (2014: 909) notes: '[i]t is archetypes such as 'strangers', 'nomads' and 'vagabonds' who populate

Bauman's world, not... concrete individuals'. This can amount to a mischaracterisation or misrepresentation of social actors living as 'sensate' and 'situated' (Wacquant, 2015: 2) subjects. White-collar boxing can be understood as a late-modern phenomenon, and has been theorised in relation to Bauman, utilising insights regarding the shift from production to consumption and space-time shrinkage to theorise this version of the sport.

This section, however, breaks from Bauman and suggests that, in this context, his conceptualisation of identity is deficient. The section below suggests that rather than identity being produced through consumption, in white-collar boxing durable, socially-informed identities, sedimented in the form of habitus, inform the qualitative experience of consumption itself. During interviews, a point of discussion was how the boxing environment looks, and whether and why participants liked or disliked the way the boxing gym looks. Included in these discussions was 'round the corner' – the dusty warehouse (Chapter 5). Unlike most participants, Maude liked this environment:

[I]t's much like a barn. Um, almost like an old garage building. Um, I, I like the fact that it's not super-clean and it feels like it's, I dunno it feels like, it's part of the process of going through boxing. Stripping down any misconceptions you might have about boxing and um, it's part of that kind of blank canvas. Y'know, you don't need any equipment, you just need a room.

This, however, is not why 'round the corner' is used as a place to train. It is used as a place to train as there is not enough space in the gym to accommodate white-collar boxers, whose presence increases the population of the gym by over 100%. That is, it is not used for its conditions, but despite them. Indeed, most participants prefer to train in the club, and dislike the warehouse as it is dusty and lacking in equipment:

Oliver: I don't really like that room to be honest. It's just quite, quite dusty in there isn't it? [...] Generally it's not a problem, y'know what I mean it's, but generally, if I had the choice between the two I'd be in the gym and not the room. But, there is more room in the other room, because obviously there's a lot of people doin' it, um you can't fit 'em all in so... it is a good space and I can see why they do it [...]. I don't mind goin' in there, d'you know what I mean? It's a bit colder than the gym but once you start warmin' up you don't get cold anyway, do yer?

That for Maude training 'round the corner is a likeable 'part of the process of going through boxing' and a way of 'stripping down' is similar to those white-collar boxers in Trimbur's (2013: 136) study who find training in functional, basic conditions formed of economic inequality to be 'purifying'. Indeed, in this way, Maude finds getting dirty to be cleansing. This is ironic, in that dirty and clean are conditionally opposite on a material level, but this is not what is meant here by cleansing. As Trimbur explains, those with high stocks of capital find boxing to be a 'soulful' experience based on 'primitive' surroundings (Trimbur, 2013: 136-7). Dirt is not typically considered valuable, but here by Maude it is valorised. In training at Shadcote, she finds abstract worth greater than its common material worth; through dirtying her body, she is cleansing her soul.

However, unlike Trimbur's context, not all white-collar boxers at Shadcote can be understood as dominant; many white-collar boxers in this study are characterised by relatively low capital stocks. Such participants like training at Shadcote *despite* its materiality. For example:

Robert: Um, it's quite compact... It's probably a good thing they do the sparring outside the ring and inside the ring, otherwise we'd never get any ring time or anything like that so. I don't think there's many punchbags there. There's not a lot of equipment for the boxing. It seems to do the job. I think it's homely.

Various participants described the gym as homely, or variations of homely. This was sometimes articulated when participants voluntarily compared Shadcote to other gyms, particularly those sometimes referred to as 'health clubs'. These comparisons were often made when explaining, in interview, why they like training at Shadcote:

Ben: 'Um, it's a very sort of, um, what I would describe as a 'backstreet' type gym. It's not plush and modern like some of these sort of health clubs you go to, but in a way that makes it more sort of welcoming'.

Jack: I don't know how to explain it... I mean, I know someone who works at a health club, now that's, it's a lot smarter in there, but, you've not got the homely feel.

That the gym is 'welcoming' and 'homely' is understood by the above participants to be a natural arrangement: *i.e.* the conditions *imply*

homeliness. However, not everyone would find the gym homely. Home is a social construction (Somerville, 1997), ultimately meaning that there is nothing intrinsic to the boxing club that makes it feel this way to certain actors. The above can be understood to demonstrate that participants have a 'sense of one's place' (Bourdieu, 1989: 19) in the world according to social class.

Beyond this, some white-collar boxers articulated that they like training at Shadcote because they feel unwelcome at other (non- boxing) gyms due to social class:

Ash: I can't be doing with going to like um David Lloyd's or somewhere like that. I don't feel like as welcome, if you know what I mean, at them sort of places... just because, I don't know, just cos of where I grew up and that, I'm not really, like, it seems too upper class if you know what I mean.

Nev: I don't really think I'd fit in one of these kinda like plush clubs kinda thing, like a David Lloyds' or somethin'. Plus they're bloody expensive as well... it's like seventy quid a month, y'know in some of those places.

Atkinson (2015: 178) notes that 'identity is about whether we feel we fit in somewhere... or among certain people, whether we feel like a fish out of water and whether we feel superior or inferior'. All participants above can be understood to articulate a sense of place, based on social class, articulating that Shadcote feels like home and is welcoming, compared to plush health clubs. Indeed, for some plush health clubs were understood to be unwelcoming.

Those few white-collar boxers at Shadcote of a dominant class position also understood sense of place, which can be located in terms of social class. Richard reflected on his first time at the gym during an interview, and an encounter with the coaches, which made him feel 'like an idiot' (Richard, interview):

Richard: I mean I've not been in a gym like this before in my life. But I was like, I was like thinking well, maybe when we turn up y'know there's changing rooms to get changed, have a shower after, know what I mean?... I even said to Rick: 'On Monday, when we turn up is there a changing room anywhere or shower?'

[...] and he looked at another of the coaches and started laughin'. He said, 'Look mate, I don't know if you've ever been in a gym like this before but', he says, 'that door at the back there is for running out of and being sick' um 'and this door on the side you go out of if you need a piss'. He says, 'We're short on space, there's no changing room, no showers, just turn up in yer gear, and clear off in yer gear'. And I went, I went, 'Right, no, I haven't been in a gym like this!'

The gym does have toilets and there is a small changing room, large enough for one person to change in. Nonetheless, this interview extract demonstrates there are certain values upheld in the gym, and for Richard, interacting at the boxing club initially led to a scenario where there was dissonance between these values and those by which he navigates social life. Knowledge of 'sense of place' in the world in symbolic terms, here manifest in a physical environment: Shadcote Boxing Club.

Similarly, Saul reflected that when he first entered the club he thought: 'Oh shit, maybe I shouldn't be here [...] I was a little bit intimidated because the gym felt a little bit rough as compared to the uni gym which was very nice. I didn't know what I might run into'. He continued to note that his friends had warned him against going to Shadcote, as it is a 'rough, blue-collar gym'. Again, this suggests a sense of place in the world is derived from social class. As Bourdieu (1989: 19) notes 'Habitus thus implies a "sense of one's place" but also a "sense of the place of others"'. When Saul questioned the sensibility of his presence, he was ultimately questioning whether he should be consuming white-collar boxing at Shadcote based on his class identity.

Atkinson (2015: 68) notes that boxing is 'the classic example' through which to demonstrate that practices are not intrinsically classed, because 'they are appropriated and given different meanings... by different classes at different times' (Chapter 2). The findings presented above present a development to this classic example. Whereas Bourdieu (2010: 212) states that 'at different times' different classes of practitioners find value in the same facet of social life, it can be gleaned from this research that it is possible for different classes of practitioners to consume social life *at the same time but for different reasons*. The scenario here does not straightforwardly reflect nor reject, but develops Bourdieu's theory of the relationship between class and taste. Consumption – singular – does not encompass the social reality of

white-collar boxing. There are different consumptions of white-collar boxing and these are informed by social class.

Late, liquid, risk or the second modernity – all terms used by Bauman, though to varying degrees, which he synonymously uses to describe the social condition beckoned via the shift to consumption from production – entails ‘an unprecedented freedom of experimenting’ (Bauman in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1999: *xviii*). White-collar boxing could be understood as a means of experimentation; as discussed in Chapter 5, it entails a short-term taste of a long-term career. It is a form of tourism, and the consumption of the commodified, idealised experience of professional boxing. However, it does not follow that what is being experimented with or on is identity. The above discussion suggests that embodied identity, durable dispositions formed in relation to capital stocks, informs the wish to experiment, and the qualitative experience of that experimentation.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

White-collar boxing began in New York in the 1980s, specifically as a form of boxing exclusively for wealthy elites. It was named deliberately to reflect the social class of practitioner. This chapter suggests that in the Shadcote context, white-collar boxing has a misleading title. Participants did not understand the term white-collar to have class connotations, or to reflect the phenomenon in which they were involved. Those few who did understand the term white-collar to have class connotations, and knew of the history of white-collar boxing, rejected this understanding as applicable to this context. Rather, white-collar boxing is understood as a form of the sport in which beginners undertake an eight-week training programme ending in a boxing match.

The class positions of white-collar boxers at Shadcote were addressed. Questionnaire data suggest that the capital stocks of many white-collar boxers, and ultimately, therefore, position in social space, are different to white-collar boxers in NYC. Questionnaire data are limited but were here engaged with, given that the scholarly understanding of white-collar boxing up until now has been that white-collar boxing is always, exclusively undertaken by middle-class and upper-middle-class men. Analysis indicates this scholarly understanding is misinformed. Analysis of interview data further supports this, though in less-reductive, richer terms. Together with

the questionnaire data this strongly suggests that white-collar boxing as a title does not accurately reflect the social class of practitioners. This is not to say that all participants can be located in the same class position, however, and some participants in this study can be understood as dominant in terms of capital stocks.

White-collar boxing is a late-modern form of boxing, and is not solely undertaken by actors from one social class. This could be taken to provide evidence for a severance of the relationship between class and taste, and ultimately class identity. This chapter suggests that whilst white-collar boxing is not exclusively consumed by one social class, the qualitative experience of consumption differs according to social class. In doing so, it presents a development to the Bourdieusian understanding of class and taste, and suggests that Bauman's understanding that in the consumer society class ceases to be meaningful is flawed in this context.



## **7. Sparring**

### **7.1 Introduction**

For Bauman (2012: 56): 'It is high time to start wandering: are those forms of life-in-common, known to most of us solely from ethnographic reports sent from the few remaining niches of bygone 'outdated and backward' times, irrevocably things of the past?' The implication of this statement is that, identity has now become an individualised project – there are no longer forms of life in common – except for remnants of first modernity, existing as enclaves. It is essentially the suggestion of two major boxing scholars (Matthews, 2016; Woodward, 2007) that boxing should be understood in this capacity. A site of ontological certainty, standing in contrast to the world-at-large, which is now liquid. This chapter will argue that this has the wrong tone.

This chapter discusses sparring which, in brief, is full contact boxing training. It discusses white-collar boxers entering the gym and negotiating the requirements of sparring. In white-collar boxing, sparring serves as a preparatory exercise in which white-collars learn to fight ready for fight night. White-collar boxers do not develop a finely tuned pugilistic capital, but do develop the rudimentary dispositions of a boxer through practice. All participants enter the gym novices in terms of the sport and for the purpose of consuming the white-collar boxing experience. Whereas for Bauman, being is only sustained through consumption, this chapter argues that participants enter the gym on different terms, and their being in the world prior to the consumption of white-collar boxing informs the qualitative experience of that consumption. Whereas for Bauman identity has become an individualised project, and the social divisions of modernity cease to inform identity in the social mode of consumption, it is argued that, whilst white-collar boxing is a late-modern practice, this is not the case. Primarily, the discussion held here is one of gender – sparring is approached differently by men and women at Shadcote – though it is also argued that gender as it intersects with class and (racialised) nationality also co-ordinate action in this consumption practice.

## 7.2 What is Sparring?

Though this will be further problematised throughout this chapter in terms specific to white-collar boxing, on a rudimentary level, sparring is full-contact training in the context of the gym. As a reference point, which essentially reflects sparring as it is undertaken at Shadcote, Wacquant (2004: 78) notes the following: '[t]he point of sparring... is to approximate the conditions of the fight, with the difference that boxers wear protective headgear and heavily padded gloves and that... the brutality of the confrontation is greatly attenuated'. Similar has been noted by various boxing scholars (Dowling, 1846; Trimbur, 2013; Sugden, 1996). To this extent, whilst sparring can be competitive, it is not a contest. As Trimbur (2013: 132-33) notes: '[a] spar traditionally consists of two people working offense and defense together'. In this regard, when two people are in the ring sparring, they are referred to as sparring partners, rather than opponents, or some such term that implies pure (ant)agonism. As Wacquant (2004: 86) notes, the sparring situation is rather one of 'antagonistic cooperation', and as noted in another sparring context – Brazilian Jiu Jitsu – it is this relationship that makes this aspect of training 'feasible and desirable' (Dutkiewicz and Spencer, 2017: 137).

Wacquant (2004: 83) expands upon this dynamic, borrowing from Goffman (1959), noting that sparring entails a 'working consensus' between fighters: it operates according to 'neither a norm nor a contract'; rather the limits of acceptable violence are continually agreed upon through practice. In a similar capacity to Trimbur's (2013: 133) notion of working 'together', for Wacquant (2004: 86) maintaining 'equilibrium' is a key principle of sparring. This might, for instance, entail that if there is a weight and/or ability difference between sparring partners that anyone with such an advantage does not use it, but adapts to the situation in such a way that it remains a fruitful exercise for both involved.

In this capacity, sparring is widely understood as a learning exercise. Written in the context of prize-fighting, or proto-professional boxing (Chapter 2), Dowling (1846: 109) notes: 'To prize-fighters sparring is as indispensable as the knowledge of the sword exercise to a dragoon... it is the grammar, the rules of which he must study before he can expect to excel'. This statement from Dowling was written prior to the establishment of any other forms of boxing than prizefighting – amateur boxing was established in 1867 – though this statement can be taken to apply to the purpose of sparring in

many forms of boxing. That Dowling indicates that knowledge and grammar are significant here is important; boxing and other combat sports have been discussed at length in terms of embodied knowledge, particularly in terms of habitus (*cf.* Garcia, 2013; Hogeveen, 2013). Sparring can be understood as a learning exercise through which knowledge becomes embodied.

Sparring has been referred to as violent (Wacquant, 2004; Matthews, 2011; Woodward, 2011). Violence is a term with multiple meanings signifying different practices and modes of domination (Arendt, 1969; Bourdieu, 1985; Mckie, 2006; Zizek, 2008). Whether sparring should be considered violent is therefore overall beyond the scope of this thesis. Whilst De Garis (2000: 100), for instance, refers to sparring as nonviolent aggression, it is widely agreed upon that sparring, is violent, but only a certain controlled form of violence differing from pure domination (Sugden, 1996; Matthews, 2011; Trimbur, 2013; Wacquant, 2004). This should be acknowledged to further understanding sparring. Often, violence is understood as a synonym for pure domination, force, or violation (Arendt, 1969). Sparring is irreducible to these terms (Matthews and Channon, 2017). Though immediately disparate and not entirely equivalent practices, the violence contained within sparring is perhaps akin to BDSM. Consensual harm, with limits to the boundaries of such harm, are features of both sparring (Wacquant, 2004; Garcia, 2013; Sugden, 1996) and BDSM (Ross, 2012). Indeed, it has been noted that boxing is (homo)erotic (Wacquant, 1995a; 2004) and the feeling it produces orgasmic (Wacquant, 1995a). In BDSM, consenting to occupy the submissive role ultimately affirms dominance, and also therefore disrupts the dominant/dominated binary through which violence is often understood: BDSM is misunderstood as abusive for the violence in terms of pure domination it *seems* to contain (Newmahr, 2010; Ross, 2012).

Similar could be said of sparring:

‘what has every chance of looking like a spree of gratuitous and unchecked brutality in the eyes of a neophyte is in fact a regular and finely coded tapestry of exchanges that, though they are violent, are nonetheless constantly controlled, and whose weaving together supposes a practical and continual collaboration between the two opponents in the construction and maintenance of a dynamic conflictual equilibrium’ (Wacquant, 2004: 85-86).

The white-collar boxers in this study are essentially neophytes, in that they are all newcomers to the sport. However, many participants do understand sparring as something other than gratuitous and unchecked brutality. For example:

Robert: Well, I think the sparring, as I said before, it's not about taking somebody's head off with a punch. Uum, it's about getting the technique right. Whereas if you can get the technique right in sparring, everything should come good on the day.

Being able to articulate that sparring *should* be conducted in these terms, however, does not entail that one *can* conduct sparring in these terms. As my field notes state: 'You simply cannot tell someone how to do this' (field notes, February). That is, knowing in terms expressed above does not entail the 'practical mastery... acquired by experience of the game' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 61) or even preceding mastery, basic competence required to spar. Indeed mastery is not acquired during these eight weeks. White-collar boxers enter the gym complete beginners, and via sparring acquire a limited amount of pugilistic ability necessary to participate in fight night:

Rick: understanding the fight game especially in a short period of time, there are many hurdles to cross, before how good their boxing is becomes an issue. Making them safe, making them understand what they're about to do, coping with fear, coping with breakdown mechanisms, coping with the y'know, the demanding fitness tasks, and all the rest, that they need to develop those very very quickly [...] once they've been hit, once they've fought different people, once they've relaxed into it and become confident in moving around the ring, then I think the quality of the boxing then improves, and that's when you start, whereas I think with ABA I think they do it the other way round, I think we put a flip on it um, we get you safe, get you fit, get you to expect you know what's comin', get you to be able to look after yourself and then um, and then if you're still around and you wanna hone your skills, because nobody's doing it professionally or whatever, nobody's gonna take off to be a pro boxer, um then they choose to do it at their own will and volition.

Embodied knowledge, however, does not only exist in boxers. Rather, the possibility of social interaction is, in principle, predicated by embodied

knowledge (Chapter 4). Whilst all beginners to boxing, everyone who enters Shadcote Boxing Club, does so carrying with them in the form of habitus – and equally it is habitus that carries them to the gym, even at the literal, pedestrian level – dispositions informed by recurrent practice. To some extent, every habitus is a pugilistic habitus, though not all are equally stocked with pugilistic capital, meaning that not everyone is equally as capable of boxing. Put in a ring, even those who had never even heard of boxing would do *something* in reaction to a boxer jabbing at them. As one participant reflects on his, and others', first instances of sparring: 'but it's one of those things, 'til you learn how to do things, you're running on instinct' (Nigel, interview). However, as the following sections will argue, instinctual reactions to sparring – what that *something* is – differ, and are only instinctual in terms of 'second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56); the sedimentation of social practice throughout the life course within the body, which is equally the motor for social practice.

Wacquant (2004: 86) notes that in terms of sparring, novices 'are incapable of calibrating their aggressiveness and rest convinced that they must go all out to prove themselves'; they must 'be taught *in actu*' the equilibration entailed in sparring. That is, knowledge of how to consensually work with and against one's partner must be learnt through practice. Working with and against Wacquant here, however, the following sections will retain that sparring must be learnt *in actu*, but that 'negotiating' (Trimbur, 2013: 97; Garcia, 2013: 158) the more violent aspects of sparring in these terms for newcomers to the sport is more varied than Wacquant suggests. The production of pugilistic sensibilities is dependent upon the conditions through which participants have become human up until entry to the gym. Whilst they are all beginners to the sport, entering the gym with the understanding that they are to be moulded – though rudimentarily so – into fighters, white-collar boxers do not all enter Shadcote Boxing Club on the same terms. The production of white-collar boxers within an eight-week timeframe is in various ways dependent upon the prior socialisation of participants throughout the lifecourse, particularly according to gender.

### 7.3 Women

*Two female white-collar boxers get out of the ring, having sparred for the first time ever. It was, perhaps expectedly given*

*it was their first time, not the best. They were very reluctant to hit one another. I go over and chat to them, asking them about the experience, and to try and find out what was going on in the ring. They tell me that they can't hit 'because they're women'. One of them said that she felt there was 'something holding her back' from punching other people, which she could not articulate or explain fully, but felt that it was due to being a woman that this was the case. To try and explain this further, she gestured trying to throw a punch and used her other non-punching arm/hand to grab her punching arm and pull it back (adapted from fieldnotes, May 2015).*

When female white-collar boxers enter Shadcote Boxing Club, they often do so with a fear of hurting others. This embodied disposition effects the ability to spar, at once physically and emotionally. This is perceived by the women to be natural, indeed in being embodied it feels natural. Through practice, however, this disposition can be curtailed and reformulated. Understood sociologically, the condition is not natural, but naturalised. This section, following Deutsch (2007) focuses on revelation of the naturalised, suggesting the contingency of gender. For female participants, the negotiation of violence that occurs during sparring is not one of decreasing, but increasing aggressiveness. That is, for the new intake of female white-collar boxers, the principle development towards the production of a pugilistic habitus, the production of a mind and body capable of undertaking the requirements of fight night, is one of developing the willingness to punch another person in the face.

Dagirmanjian *et al.* (2017: 2276) note: '[m]en are more likely than women to be violent' and this is a socially produced arrangement, though often perceived to be natural. Young (2005) has noted similar in the context of sport. The equivalent is being suggested here: female participants felt uncomfortable hitting people when sparring for the first time. Beyond this some felt literally unable to do so. This is located by these participants as being a natural result of being a woman. The fieldnote above can be read in this capacity. Interviews addressed feelings relating to first instances of sparring, and examples of responses from female participants are as follows:

Maude: I was really nervous at first, um, obviously we had done a bit of body shot work, the week before, but actually getting in

the ring and proper sparring, part of me was like 'I don't want to get in and hit people in the face, I don't want to hurt her'.

Kelly: horrible. *Horrible*. The thought of havin' to hit somebody.

Rachel: I was probably worse about havin' to hit someone than gettin' hit myself.

EW: why, why do you think that is?

Rachel: I think it's just cos it's your natural thing, I don't wanna hit no one.

Female boxers' fear of hurting others is discussed elsewhere (Trimbur, 2013; Nash, 2015). Though this research supports these accounts, this finding is not new. As a reminder: Trimbur (2013: 97) notes that '[m]any women are ambivalent about harming their opponents, believing they cannot initiate violence'. Nash (2015: 11) makes a similar point based upon her autoethnographic research on amateur boxing: she found it 'psychologically' and 'physically' difficult to punch her female sparring partner. In the context of similar combat sports and martial arts Velija *et al.* (2013) have also noted similar. However, in being in the context of white-collar boxing – a short-term, eight-week boxing programme, specifically designed to ready those undertaking it as quickly as possible to participate in public competition – there is a dynamism in this research context lacking in other boxing contexts. Whilst participants do not become as proficient in boxing as those who undertake the sport as a long-term project, through practice this disposition – presumed to be natural – in many cases quickly erodes.

Rachel: But obviously it is a sport, and that's the aim of the game. It is to hit someone. So it's just getting over that natural urge again, you gotta think you're not doin' it maliciously to hurt someone, you're doing it as part of a sport.

In recognising that this can be overcome through practice, indeed that it must be overcome through practice to participate in fight night, Rachel, whilst articulating that the fear of hitting others is natural, also recognises that it is not natural. Were it a biological certainty that women could not hit people in the face, there would be no point in training women to box. It would be impossible. That Shadcote, and many other boxing clubs,

recurrently produce female boxers, white-collar or otherwise, provides overwhelming evidence that this is not impossible, even if it experienced as so by actors – male and female – at Shadcote boxing club. Accordingly, this means that the disposition of reluctance in early instances of female white-collar boxers to cause pain to sparring partners is not natural and immutable, but is gendered; perceived as a naturally occurring disposition whilst being mutable.

The depletion in the embodied fear of hurting others can be recognised by focusing on micro-instances of social interaction, such as that described by Maude, reflecting on her early experiences of sparring:

Maude: I was like I don't want to hit someone in the face and I went for bodyshots before I went for a headshot, but then when she hit me in the face, I went 'well, I'm going to hit you back'.

Similarly, Lucy noted:

Lucy: I think it must be the same with war; it's just like 'you're just not doing that again'. You know, it's too risky, like I say, it's like a fact has been established that I'm not taking another one of those, cos it's really bad, hurts, rather than 'oh I'll try and get out the way and hopefully I'll do it' it's like 'no! That's it! I'm not havin' it anymore!'

As Wacquant (2016: 66) notes: 'dispositions are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces'. Sparring entails, in literal terms, exposure to novel external force: fists being thrown. This is not the type of force to which Wacquant refers, but it is worth recognising that sparring is a novel situation in these terms; underpinning the immediate, forceful action of sparring in the ring, is a different understanding of acceptable violence to that outside the boxing arena. It is partly for this reason that Wacquant (2004, 2014a) has noted at length that boxing is a 'field'. Indeed, another way of saying that dispositions can change under exposure to novel external forces is that upon entry to fields to which one is unaccustomed reflexive moments are produced, giving rise to the possibility of reformulating habitus. As Lucy says: 'that's it! I'm not having it anymore!' Likewise, Maude, upon being hit, decided she was going to hit her sparring partner back. That these participants overcame their initial hesitations to commit to hitting shows these hesitations are not



innate, immutable and biologically-determined as the result of being female. Rather they are established through interaction.

Lucy was interviewed during the seventh week of the eight-week training programme. Reflecting on sparring up until this point, Lucy noted:

'I think under that controlled environment, I don't have a problem with it really. Um... havin' said that I have only apologised once to someone [laughs]. And it was interesting with the girls, I don't know if it happens with the boys as well, cos I've not really seen them sparring in the, in the class sessions but um yeah, but it's so funny, I find it so interesting with the girls, like, we get in, brows furrowed, chins down, you throw for her and catch 'em and then you're like 'oh sorry!' I apologised to Rachel once. I caught her and was like 'I think that might've hurt, sorry', and she was like 'don't worry about it, let's carry on'.

In this extract, Lucy articulates that now, seven weeks into the white-collar boxing programme, she is not concerned by the requirements of sparring, but that to begin with she was. Lucy also indicates that this might be a gendered phenomenon. Finally, Lucy notes that a mutual consensus was established between her and her sparring partner, which allowed for a recalibration of disposition towards initiating violence within the context of sparring. That is, effectively, Lucy's account captures the process being described here.

Rather than constructing a category of women who seem to be completely unable to commit to violence, this account realises that whilst these dispositions do exist, they are not a result of *being* a woman (even if some participants in this study, male and female, perceive it to be the case) as much as they are the result of *becoming*, through living in a society ordered according to gender, where women are taught to be passive and men are taught to be aggressive (Hargreaves, 2003; Channon, 2013). In accordance with McNay (1999), this account subscribes to and further propounds the view that gender is embodied, enduring in late modernity, but also mutable. It is an ontological account of sorts, but one that recognises that gender as a social ontology is that which is frail, not women. Thus, whilst this section could be read as to imply that women are ambivalent to violence it should not be read as a tract on differing immutable ontologies of men and women, quite the opposite. This account is a re-presentation of the gendered reality

that those at Shadcote live *beyond the confines of the boxing club* but reconstituted through action *within* it.

#### **7.4 White-Collar Lads**

*I think a lot of the new white-collars who haven't boxed before are more reluctant to go to sparrin'. And I can imagine... I mean... I never had the experience of joining as a white-collar intake and doing sparring, it was kinda, I trained with the club members a lot, and once I signed up to have a fight started sparrin' more [...] I imagine it would be intimidating for them at first... I think a lot of them, if they're very new to it, they've probably never been punched in the face before, and that's a very new experience and it's something you can't really prepare for (Tim, interview).*

The section above argues that when female white-collar boxers enter Shadcote they often do so embodying dispositions that mean that sparring is for them problematic. This finding can be situated in relation to Trimbur (2013) who finds similar in the NYC context. Discussing these participants, Trimbur notes: '[T]he fear of violence the female boxers harbour is not about *getting* hurt; it is about hurting others' (Trimbur, 2013: 100). Trimbur (2013: 97) continues: '*[t]his is a gendered phenomenon*, which is represented by women as innate or inherent'. Gender is relational (Connell, 2005), and when Trimbur notes this, it is implied that men do not experience such anxieties when sparring. How male novices do negotiate sparring is however unaddressed by Trimbur. Perhaps given that boxing has traditionally been a male-dominated sport (Woodward, 2007), and that most sociological research on boxing is not concerned with beginners, but those with a thoroughly-crafted pugilistic habitus (e.g. Wacquant, 1995b; Sugden, 1996; Woodward, 2004), the gendered process of sparring for male beginners to the sport remains unexamined. This section therefore discusses an equivalent process to that discussed in the previous section, but in relation to men. If, for women, as Trimbur notes, the fear is not about getting hurt but about hurting others, for men it is the opposite: the fear is not about hurting others, it is about getting hurt.

As per the female white-collar boxers above, male white-collar boxers were asked in interview to reflect upon their first instances of sparring. Often, and

in opposition to the female participants, responses to this question discuss discomfort with being punched in the face:

Al: Yeah I can remember it, and the feeling I'd put it next to was being stood outside the headmaster's office and you know you was in for a bollocking, when I was waiting for my first minute [...] sparrin'. I just thought 'what if I get punched in the face?'

James: it was nervous, um, it, it brought everything into perspective. Like, we've all had trouble in town, and we all think we're hard, you know what I mean? But boxing is just so much harder, I mean it was nervous getting... punched in the face, first time. Knowing it was coming know what I mean? It's like, when you've had a few beers and you know what I mean, a fight happens, and in thirty seconds it's over. But when you've got, let's say you do three two-minute rounds there's nowhere to hide. Y'know what I mean?

EW: can you remember like how it [sparring for the first time] felt?

Craig: scary, yeah yeah. I was like, I get nervous now. Sparring, I have to mentally talk me'sen into it [...] yeah, that's the thing, somebody's about to smack yer in the face. Lot of handy lads in here, know what I mean? You *will* get knocked about by 'em.

Boxing requires an acceptance of getting hurt, or at least the possibility of getting hurt (Oates, 2006). This is learnt through sparring: an intersubjective exercise in simultaneous consensual domination and submission between partners. This arrangement, as discussed in 7.2, requires careful management, and an understanding that although sparring resembles fighting, pure domination is not its aim. To these male participants who are new to the sport however, it forces confronting the possibility of being dominated.

It is relevant that it is the face as opposed to the body that these participants focus upon as being at risk. As Synnott (1993: 73) notes the face is 'the prime symbol of the self'. Others have noted similar (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Indeed, in *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (2001: 17) notes that the face is a 'point of honour' in that it houses the 'noble organs

of self-presentation which concentrate social identity'. In this capacity, via means other than the implication that these dispositions are diametrically opposed between male and female entrants to Shadcote, this gendered disposition can be further explained. The fear of being hit is one of 'losing face' (Goffman, 1967) in terms of being able to construct oneself as a physically powerful, 'traditionally masculine' man.

This fear manifests physically in initial instances of sparring in two ways: *pushing away* and *chucking bombs*. These will be addressed in turn, and following this discussed together, as the aim of both is ultimately the same. As noted in my field diary:

'Turns away as he gets hit. This is his 2nd sparring session. He pushes away with both hands' (fieldnotes, January 2015).

'A big problem with white-collars is that their guard is loose and they push away with both hands' (fieldnotes, February 2015).

'New white-collars push away with their hands' (fieldnotes, April 2015).

If pushing away is one such survival technique for new male white-collar boxers, being overly-aggressive in the ring is another:

'new white-collar got frustrated and started chucking bombs.' (field notes, April).

'Chucking bombs' here means punching with force exceeding that established through working consensus. Like pushing away, doing so is a response to fear of being dominated. Both however ultimately result in being dominated, in that they entail loss of composure – a dropped guard and an open target:

'The reason he gets hit is because he flails in with, to be fair, mostly straight shots, but leaves himself open. Doesn't pick the gaps. So, whilst he's doing that, all that needs to be done is for someone to pick on the gaps. One punch will connect over his ill-measured six that miss' (field notes, February).

The boxing stance entails that gloves rest on the chin as a means of protecting the face from inbound shots. This is known as a guard, or keeping your guard up. Positioning the gloves in this way means that if punches are not successfully evaded, through for instance slipping or ducking, or they

are not parried, then there is a last line of defence. Experienced boxers position themselves in this way without thinking. Through practice, that is, through routinely positioning the body in this way, this becomes disposition, or 'outside of consciousness' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 61). Rather than automatically keeping a tight guard in the face of inbound punches, white-collars often automatically move both hands out towards their sparring partner to block the punches. Turning away and chucking bombs, both entail that a guard is no longer in place. Pushing away and chucking bombs can both be understood as attempting to create distance between partners, reacting to the possibility of being punched in the face. Pushing away entails withdrawing from the sparring engagement, whereas chucking bombs can be understood as an attempt to force the other to withdraw. Both result in domination. It leaves one open to attack as the face is no longer protected, and sparring partner no longer in vision. White-collar lads must therefore learn to stand face-to-face with the other to remain safe.

As noted in relation to female white-collar boxers, negotiating violence entailed in sparring renders a reflexive moment. For the white-collar lads, a choice can be made: either to walk away, and cease to train for fight night, or accept the possibility of domination, that is accept being punched in the face, that is, giving self to other. As Al recalls:

'On the first week, Rick was like, we've got 70 people here... ten of you will get home and your missus will say you're not doin' it, the next ten of you when you start sparring will get punched in the face and think 'fuck it, it isn't for me, I'm off, I'm going home, I'm not doing it anymore' [...] I know some tough lads who've been down. Like Noel, big big muscly lad, got punched in the face never went back, he says 'that's not for me' – and I didn't want to be that person'.

Though data are largely lacking on the phenomenon of 'dropping out' the above does indicate a perception that multiple white-collar boxers drop out at the point that violence is required to be negotiated. Al, on the other hand, decided that he did not want 'to be that person'. Similarly, Will noted:

'there is something that you've gotta overcome when you get, when you get in there [in the ring to spar for the first time]. And the first thing is just you're survival instinct k-kick in, first things first. Then as you progress through sparring, you start to relax

more, and then you start to implement techniques into the sparring, but, like I say when you first get in the ring, it's just 'let's survive'.

For the English men, upon entry to the gym, the giving of self to other is what is problematic in the first instance. However, participants illustrated in interview that this process is subject to change through practice:

EW: yeah... so if it's like scary, and like you say, some handy lad's gonna smack you in the face, why d'you do it?

Craig: it's a rush int'it, it's, part of being scared is adrenaline, the rush. And it is part of the sport, you have to, you have to do it to get better. You have to do it to not get smacked in the face.

James: Obviously, no one likes being punched in the face, like I say, but... the thing with sparring, it teaches you how to not get punched in the face, y'know what I mean?

Through negotiation via practice, participants become able to trade the risk of domination in order to produce the feeling of being dominant: you have to risk getting punched in the face to not get punched in the face, and, moreover, to land some punches yourself. You will have to take a few knocks, and by taking a few, it becomes normal. Whilst 'no one likes it', as James said, taking it and remaining on guard means that further punches to the face can be avoided or attenuated. Atkinson (2015: 76) notes that it is simply 'the domination of others' that allows for 'respect' or 'recognition' to be gained through boxing. If both sparring partners operate in manner explained above, however, both simultaneously experience the feeling of being dominant, as both hold back from fully dominating the other. Crucially, through embodying this approach, by partaking in sparring in such a way that neither dominates, a situation emerges in which *both* sparring partners can get respect. As Jack noted, those sparring 'give respect out' (Jack, interview), to receive respect too.

In this regard, on the discussion of what a 'good sparring partner' entails, participants noted variations of the following:

Nev: a good sparring partner? I mean someone who shows respect, I mean, if they're better than you they don't take the micky. Obviously if you've got your guard low they stick one on

yer kind of thing, just to make you aware, to point out your mistakes.

Likewise, a bad sparring partner:

Elliot: um, someone that's tryin' to beat you up as such. That's not respectful.

The acquisition of respect has also been discussed in relation to amateur and professional boxing (Woodward, 2004; Wacquant, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 3, the white working-class boxing hero is a respected figure in the context of deindustrialisation (Rhodes, 2011). Whilst physical prowess overall ceases to be capital in the service economy, boxing is one field wherein physicality remains capital, and professionals become celebrated for their success through the 'tradition of physical work and self-reliance' (Rhodes, 2011: 366). Many white-collar lads are indistinguishable in terms of social class from pro boxers, and those who enter the ring feel 'huge respect' (Oliver, interview). For the white-collar lads, sparring not only amounts to training for fight night, but is also itself a practice through which respect is gained in the context of post-industrialism wherein it cannot be guaranteed through work. If the initial fear of domination can be overcome through practice, sparring therefore becomes a rewarding part of the process.

'A few [white-collar] got black eyes tonight. Rick calls them a badge of honour' (Fieldnotes, February 2015).

A black eye is an indicator that the recipient has given self to other, literally made visible by imprint of other on self. Blemished skin is often assumed to be stigmatising (Goffman, 1963), and can essentially be understood as a mark of disrespect, but here black eyes are constructed as an indicator of pugilist morality. Weakness, recast as strength and honour. Whilst for De Garis (2010), sometimes a bloody nose is 'just a bloody nose' – which along with black eyes are the two most likely visible sparring injuries – for Rick, they are signs of being able to take a punch, and a sign of 'being a man' (Atkinson, 2015: 77): *my face shows that someone tried to dominate me, but I survived*. Likewise, as is written on one of the walls of the club: IN THE FACE OF DEATH, NEVER SURRENDER. The walls of Shadcote Boxing Club are also heavily decorated by the national flag of England, hanging banally, but underpinned by a hot nationalism. Through sparring, the white-collar

lads reproduce the club as an organisation underpinned by a dominant, masculine *white* Englishness.

### 7.5 Eastern European Lads

*There was a guy, who err... quite chunky... err, I think he was a foreign chap, sure he was. Quite a heavy lad [...] he was being a dick, people looked on him as a dick, the way he was, everything was full-on, and it's not about that, he was just tryin' to pound into people. Like, 'you don't even know what you're doin' mate', there was no technique, he was just tryin' to slug. I thought he was a bit of a plank (Wes, interview).*

A source of tension in the gym formed around a minority group in the gym, constructed by others as Eastern Europeans, or the Eastern European lads (Chapter 5). This tension was produced primarily through sparring:

Nev: I think there was erm, there was an Eastern European feller [...] he was quite err, he was quite rogue-ish in his sparring and he got dealt with, he got taught a lesson. Well, not taught a lesson, but the club lads was a bit harder with him, hard with him.

EW: who was that?

Nev: Alexei [...] he looked like he wanted to kill everybody he fought [sparred].

EW: yeah, so is there anybody at the club you think is like a bad sparring partner then?

James: um, there's one lad, I don't know his name, Latvian lad...

EW: Martin?

James: yeah that one yeah. Yeah him, I don't think he knows to... he's just there laying into people. I don't think that's, I think he's, he wants to feel big about himself rather than wanting to learn, d'you know what I mean? To me that was, a different approach to what I'd take anyway.



EW: yeah, so what, can you remember when that was happening, what were you kind of feeling? Were you watching? Or?

James: yeah when that was happening, I was watching, I was just, I don't know, *disbelief*. People were telling him to calm it down and he was just laying into everyone, and like people half his size, laying into them, know what I mean? Gary's eleven stone, he's about sixteen! Fifteen, sixteen stone, so.... He was just laying into people.

On multiple occasions during fieldwork similar occurred to that described above by James and Nev. The following field diary extract describes one such scenario:

Lukas is due to spar for the first time. He is clearly quite pumped up. Possibly nervous. Quiet, breathing heavily, pacing around the gym with a serious expression. Chad is due to go in with him. I explain to Lukas that it's not a fight. It is sparring. Not trying to knock him out. If you land a good shot or two back off. He finds out he is sparring Chad and fistbumps him. Chad finds it funny. It is hard to articulate why, but so do I. It is just slightly wrong. He misjudged the seriousness of it? Lukas asks me to help him put gloves on. He wants them really tight. Makes a big deal about it.

They both climb through the ropes and into the ring. Rick tells Lukas that if he hits Chad hard Chad will hit him back harder, as a precautionary measure to try and calm Lukas down, and ultimately to keep both Chad and Lukas safe. The round begins. Lukas repeatedly swings for Chad. No shots connect. Chad catches Lukas with a few punches, but remains measured, and holds back from dominating. The round ends and Lukas is unhappy with the outcome. He gets out the ring and shakes his head. For him, this is a loss. He wants one more round to prove himself, is insistent about this. He can't for now, others need ring time.

Chad and Lukas are back in the ring. Lukas far more aggressive this time, although Greg has also given him 'the talk': this is not a fight, it is just sparring. He swings wildly at Chad. Not many connect, Chad takes it on the gloves, landing a few shots.

Towards the end of the round Chad suddenly shouts in pain. He's injured his shoulder and tenses up, holding his arm. The round is stopped early and Chad gets out of the ring. Lukas sees this as a victory. He shouts: 'who's next!? Who's next!?' And puts his hands up goading those outside the ring to get in and spar with him.

Greg pulls on his gloves and gets in the ring. Lukas is taken aback. He remarks about Greg's size and that he will hurt Greg if they spar. Greg is small, a foot shorter than Lukas, and around five stone lighter. But he doesn't know Greg, and doesn't know he is a very experienced boxer. He asks if he's allowed to hit Greg. This is met with lots of raised eyebrows and breaths drawn around the ring. He begins by hitting Greg without much power. Greg allows him to do this and hits him back hard. Nearly everyone in the gym is watching. Lukas is now angry, swinging and missing as Greg bobs and weaves to avoid these shots. Greg keeps saying to him 'come on, hit me mate' subtly taunting him, making him miss. Every time Lukas misses Greg lands good clean shots on him. By the end of the round, Lukas is bloody, tired and quiet. He goes to the toilet to clean up the blood (adapted from fieldnotes, 20th Feb).

Similar accounts to the above are present in other boxing ethnographies (De Garis, 2000; Garcia, 2013). Likewise, Wacquant (2004: 82) notes: '[i]f a far superior boxer, either in weight or ability, fails to restrain himself and inflicts a beating on his sparring partner, he is sure to be vehemently reprimanded'. Lacking from other accounts of boxing however is the nationalised (and racialized) aspect present in the above. Neither Garcia's nor Wacquant's account take place within gyms with a transnational migrant population, whereas this one does. As Fox (2013: 1871) notes '[m]ore than a million East European migrants have come to the UK since 2004' – a pattern of migration not the case in 1980s Chicago (Wacquant, 2004), 1990s New York City (De Garis, 2000) or early-2000s Spain (Garcia, 2013).

Matthews's (2011) doctoral thesis, an ethnography of another boxing and weightlifting gym in the Midlands does however discuss similar (Chapter 3). For Matthews's English participants, the 'Polish lads' (Matthews, 2011: 167) treated every spar as a world title fight. The response to this version of sparring was similar to that discussed above, primarily via the vignette

regarding Chad, Greg and Lukas. Matthews, however, does not explain the production of this 'relatively physical version' of sparring, rather only the response to it:

'Gary had taken exception to Adam's relatively physical version of sparring. It was not clear whether there was a further motive for his actions, perhaps a dislike for Adam's Eastern European heritage, but what was certain was that there was a broad agreement from within the established group that this physical lesson was one that Adam needed to learn' (Matthews, 2011: 167).

Though Matthews locates Eastern European heritage as causing a violent reaction, heritage *per se* is not often understood as the cause of contemporary hostility to migrants from Eastern Europe. Rather, it is the migrant status of Eastern Europeans, and ultimately the perception that migrants pose threats to the job market (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell, 2017). As per other boxing gyms (Sugden, 1996), politics is rarely a point of discussion at Shadcote. However, this does not imply the absence of politics, and indeed there were signs that Eastern Europeans were unwelcome at the gym. Shadcote being owned by a white nationalist, the flags that mark the gym out as an English space, a poster of Nigel Farage, tucked behind one of the benches, visible through slats in the bench, all mark the gym out as an aggressively white English space, and one that does not welcome migrants. Moreover, whilst day-to-day politics was not spoken about in the gym, fieldwork was undertaken around the 2015 General Election, and, in the days before and after, talk did occasionally become political. Some of the lads at the gym indicated that they intended on voting for UKIP, whose campaign was based on antagonism to the European Union and centred on the free movement in the EU, the terms on which the Eastern Europeans at Shadcote are in England. This indicates perhaps that some of those present at the gym were not keen on the migrants present by permission of membership in the European Union. As per Matthews's account, this does explain in part why Eastern Europeans were responded to in this way. However, this still does not explain the different orientation to sparring that the Eastern European lads embodied and enacted on a regular basis, in either this, or Matthews's account.

Interview data pertaining to the Eastern European men in the gym was sought, though this is largely lacking (Chapter 4). For various reasons, these

participants were unavailable to interview. However, Vadim was available to interview, and whilst this is but one interview it provides some insight into why the above is the case.

Referring to his first instances of sparring at Shadcote, Vadim notes that:

Vadim: I thought boxing was just about proving you are better. So I tried to land as many punches as I could. It was more like wrestling than boxing. I was not thinking about defence. I was trying to be aggressive. Just forgetting what I had learnt before and going into the natural way, a brawl. And it took time to realise that boxing and wrestling and fighting are all different things.

Unlike most white-collar lads, who understand sparring to entail a working consensus, but cannot in practice initiate consensus through lack of embodied knowledge, Vadim here recognises that, on entry to the club, he did not understand that sparring can be differentiated from fighting. Equilibrium was not part of Vadim's understanding of what sparring entails, and brawling *feels* 'the natural way'. Emphatically, this is not however to say that doing so *is* natural, but 'history, turned into nature' (Bourdieu, 1977a: 78). Continuing his discussion of his initial approach to sparring, Vadim notes that, now, having participated in sparring, he understands the practice in different terms, whereas when he first started sparring he did not distinguish the practice from wrestling or boxing. Vadim continued to note that, now:

Vadim: 'I feel sorry for whenever I cause someone trouble [...] You develop your sword, but you should also develop your shield as well'.

Developing both your sword and shield can be understood as recognition of the need for equilibrium in sparring. Equally, Vadim had been at Shadcote for longer than the white-collar boxers, in this regard he had engaged for longer in sparring than his white-collar peers, and therefore had come to understand the rules of engagement.

Life history interviews were used to situate participants within context in the absence of the possibility of ethnographic data relating to the lifecourse prior to entry to the club. Vadim explains that growing up male in the Soviet Union informs his orientation towards the world, and ultimately towards sparring:

Vadim: There is a joke in Russia: men are the boys who were lucky enough to survive childhood [...] Sport was very popular in Soviet Union, it was funded, like kids could attend many different classes and it was all free of charge... but since dissolution of Soviet Union it's all gone, it's different now [...] it's still popular, but it's not heavily funded by state as it used to be.

EW: yeah

Vadim: the coaches, they were really enthusiastic about kids getting into grassroots... but the way how classes work in Russia is a little bit different... the coaches, they are very purposeful, they want kids to succeed, they want them to compete, they want them to be really harsh on themselves. Kids basically training to overcome, and to fight and serve all the time. So, you're not only going there for fun. You're going to work really hard. If you don't want to work hard, you leave.

The disposition to brawl, enacted by the Eastern European lads, can be located in a habitus formed of masculinity in the Soviet Union. To note: the Eastern European lads are aged between 25 and 40, and therefore grew up in the Soviet Union, as the transition from state socialism was made. Though there are recent contributions to studies of (post)Soviet masculinities (Muller, 2017), this is overall a neglected topic in studies of gender (Fraser, 2017; Kukhterin, 2000). Historian Muller (2017:190) however notes that a 'shared culture of masculinity' maintained through a tradition of 'national struggle' existed in the Soviet Union. The above account of Eastern European men implicates the body within a shared culture of masculinity and argues that it is 'a past which survives in the present' (Bourdieu, 1977a: 82). Vadim recognises that his initial approach to sparring was aggressive; that it was indistinguishable from other forms of fighting. He notes that this felt natural, but that through practice, his approach to sparring changed. He now distinguishes between sparring and fighting. He locates his initial dispositions towards violence within growing up male in the Soviet Union, and then Russia. In other words, the difference perceived by the English white-collar lads does exist – indeed, it is recognised as existing by both the Eastern European lads and the white-collar lads – but this difference is not essential. This expands upon Matthews's analysis, which does not discuss the production of aggression in Eastern European men in boxing contexts.

However, the foundations of this difference are misrecognised as essential difference by the English lads, who construct the Eastern European men as both racially different and non-human. The 'Rocky effect' (Keller and Ward, 2014) pertains to the transferal of images, plots and devices from the Rocky series into the world of nonfiction. In this regard, The English lads often liken the Eastern European lads to Ivan Drago. The Rocky series is famous for training montages, and in Rocky IV montages include Drago training, ahead of his world title fight against Rocky, whilst plugged into machines, participating in 'electronically, and chemically, enhanced routines' (Walsh, 2015: 21). As Keller and Ward (2014: 185) note, he is depicted as a 'human robot'.

Whilst the Eastern European lads are essentially therefore constructed as cyborg, this is not in the spirit of, for instance, Haraway (1984) or Braidotti (2013). For these theorists, cyborg identity offers the promise of rejecting human identities altogether, the realisation of a new commonality, and the heralding of a post-human utopia. The construction of Eastern Europeans as cyborg is not posthuman, as much as it is nonhuman. This can be understood in contrast to the white, English lads as 'fully' human. This becomes apparent when the white-collar lads regale one of the few lines Drago says in the film: 'if he dies, he dies' as the Eastern European lads enter the ring to spar. Like Drago, they are constructed as figures that cannot be killed, but can kill. Carrington (2010: 2-3) notes that 'the black athlete' is rarely ever 'ordinarily human' but 'nearly human, almost human, and sometimes even super-human. Human-lite or human-plus'. Indeed, for Braidotti (2013: 47) it is constructing the other as 'subhuman' in 'ontological status' that facilitates racist violence. Whilst Braidotti is referring to the violence carried out under Fascism and Colonialism, it is this same construction – Eastern Europeans understood as ontologically nonhuman – that facilitates the violent reactions to Eastern European lads highly physical sparring. Whilst the Eastern European lads are phenotypically indistinct from the white-collar lads, and Shadcote lacks the racialisation of white-collar boxing in NYC (Trimbur, 2013) wherein racism is chromatic, it can be said there is racism in the boxing club, along the lines of the most recent contemporary migration to the UK.

The above account pertaining to Eastern European men at Shadcote is limited for various reasons. Primarily, interview data is limited. Though supplemented with ethnographic data, and with data and theory from other

accounts, undoubtedly, the above is only partially explanatory of the dynamics expressed above. The following serve as reflections in these terms.

Whilst during social interaction at the club the Eastern European men are racialized by the club lads and the white-collar lads, constructed as essentially different to the English men, on an individual basis some of the English lads did express in terms similar to that in this chapter, that the aggressive approach to sparring that the Eastern European men tended to adopt is social rather than biological:

Nev: I'm glad I didn't fight him [Alexei], he's a tough bloke. I think a lot of the Eastern European are, aren't they?

EW: are they?

Nev: I think the Polish, oh yeah.

EW: yeah... why's that do you think?

Nev: I think, because quite a few Polish train at our gym [where he trains, outside of white-collar boxing] and they all, I think they've had hard lifestyles and hardship. They're quite tough, they're quite tough as a nation, Poles. Eastern Europeans as a whole... It's what I've found anyway.

Rather than locating difference as essential – as was often done at the group level – Nev here recognises that differences do exist in terms of approaches to sparring between the white-collar lads and the Eastern Europeans, though locates this as socially produced.

The Soviet Union was expansive, and to proclaim a singular 'homo soveticus' (Keenan *et al.* 2015: 4), is too simplistic. Over time and space within the Soviet Union, and the states formed post-Soviet Union, there were and are undoubtedly different articulations of masculinity. As Hearn and Pringle (2006: 190) note: The 'socio-economic conditions' of Central and Eastern European states post-1991 have 'created new variations for post-Soviet gender'. The above theorisation, sought to sociologically explain the embodied action in sparring, and Vadim located his orientation towards sparring in the Soviet Union. The theorisation is based upon this, for lack of further interview data. It should also be acknowledged that this is evidently reductionist.

Halej (2014: 111) notes that 'some East European migrant groups are 'racialised' more than others, which implies that there might be indeed certain hierarchies emerging between more and less 'desirable' East European migrants'. In other words, the category Eastern European is somewhat reductionist. This reduction exists at the club and has been sociologically explained above, but also takes as its starting point the dominant categorisation and hierarchy of the club. There is some evidence to suggest that participants grouped in this way did not get on, and sought to distance themselves. Nikos explained to the club lads that Lukas is from the countryside, whereas Nikos is from a city, and that this generates difference between them. Nikos disapproves of the way in which Lukas behaves and described him as a 'disrespectful idiot' (fieldnotes, March 2015). This potentially signals to the identity of Eastern European lad being one that is not straightforwardly embraced by those to whom it is assigned at the club. It also potentially indicates a distancing from racialized stigma of being, in terms of Shadcote Boxing Club, Eastern European.

## **7.6 Sparring as a Production Process**

Whilst sharing with other boxing contexts the purpose of training for competition, white-collar sparring at Shadcote serves another purpose, absent from other sparring contexts white-collar (Trimbur, 2013) or otherwise (*e.g.* Sugden, 1996, Boddy, 2008). In summary, here sparring is an integral component of the match-making process for fight night. This is an unusual practice, one that appears to be unique to the form of white-collar boxing observed in this study.

Unlike the majority of boxing, in white-collar boxing those fighting against each other train together in the same gym. Come fight night, the white-collar boxers who train together at Shadcote will be divided into red corner fighters and blue corner fighters, and will fight against one another. Establishing who will compete against each other on fight night is decided by the coaching staff through observing sparring sessions. Potential match-ups are put in the ring with one another to spar as a means of assessing whether a fight is equally matched.

Weight categories in professional and amateur boxing are precise and form a criterion through which matches are made (Chapter 2). Rick rejects this model of match-making as inappropriate for white-collar boxing:



Rick: they're not matched on weight. Some places do, but the places that match them on weight haven't matched them on ability of anything else, basically they've taken the easy, the easy way out. [...] in the amateur or pro world, in the weights they've got to be quite finite. But the reason is because the level of training should've been that excellent that they are punching their weight, so they are throwing every pound at the opponent, so, that extra pound or whatever makes all the difference. When you take it to the white-collar, and you've only trained them for say, eight weeks [...] if they haven't developed the necessary skills of punching their weight, you could easily match a fourteen-stone man with a nineteen-stone man and have the same amount of power output, and it be a fair fight, as you know. But the only way you would know that is to have a massive insight into the people who were, who are matched.

In terms of professional boxing, a nineteen-stone man would be a Heavyweight, whereas a fourteen-stone man would be a Cruiserweight, the weight division below Heavyweight. Rick's example here is perhaps not the most useful, in that Heavyweight professional boxing has no upper weight limit, meaning that there is one weight category between the two weights he stated, and only just so: the lower limit for heavyweights is 14 stone 4lbs. The five-stone weight difference between ten stone and 15 stone would equate to an eight-weight category difference in professional boxing, a Super Lightweight versus a Heavyweight, which perhaps demonstrates in clearer terms the initial unimportance of weight to the match-making process.

Overall, Rick's point is that there can be a weight difference between white-collar boxers far greater than is allowed for in amateur or professional boxing, whilst still being safe. Throwing punches in boxing requires not just movement of the arms, but the generation of power from the feet upwards meaning that maximum possible power delivers the fist to the target (Chapter 5). Through years of practice, the ability to punch this way becomes 'second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56); or, a pugilistic habitus is developed (Wacquant, 2004). As white-collar training is an eight-week process, the possibility of developing a pugilistic habitus is limited, meaning weight cannot be taken as a guarantee of punching power, and therefore not of a fair fight. For Rick, a fight matched on weight alone for these eight-

week trainees could indeed be dangerous, not least because weight, for white-collar boxers, is not a measure of strength. Two white-collar boxers, who weigh the same, could be physically very different in terms of muscle/fat ratio, whereas the presumption is in amateur and professional boxing is that the weight of the boxer is for the most part muscle (see: Morton *et al.*, 2013). For Rick, his insight into and control over the match-making process means that potential dangers of such match-ups are quashed. Observing, prior to fight night, the relative pugilistic skills of would-be opponents is therefore undertaken during sparring.

For the most part, match-making as a purpose of sparring is not announced to the white-collar boxers, though some guess this is the case:

Oliver: I-I sparred with three people last week, two of 'em I actually got the better of, I thought, obviously I'm not an expert but I pretty much got the better of the two of 'em, and one of 'em got the better of me, urm, it turned into a bit of a scrap to be honest, um, and then we got weighed afterwards, the one that's a bit better than me, so I think they're headin' that way on the fight night.

Though Oliver understood sparring to entail a match-making exercise, there is still uncertainty present in his account. At this stage, like most white-collar boxers, he is unsure who he will be fighting on the night. He has an inclination it will be someone specific, but this ultimately remains unverified. Unlike Oliver, however, many white-collar boxers have no idea who they will be fighting, and cannot make an informed guess. Who is matched with who is not disclosed to white-collar boxers during the eight-week training programme. It is rather revealed at the weigh-in (Chapter 8) at the end of the eight weeks, prior to fight night (Chapter 9).

Oliver refers to being weighed after his sparring session. Whilst weight is not a principal criterion through which matches are made in white-collar boxing, it is not entirely irrelevant. Rick continued to note:

Rick: people look at it, if we can get an even weight and an even ability, then to be honest, yes, that's ideal.

When Rick notes that 'people look at it', referring to matches that are obviously not matched according to weight, what is meant is that outsiders to the white-collar boxing world look at match-ups with visible weight

differences and judge them as dangerous. Indeed, there are media reports wherein amateur boxing officials pronounce white-collar boxing as dangerous for this reason (e.g. Munday, 2015). Moreover, there are occasionally reports of injuries caused through mismatches in terms of weight difference, which tend to include calls for white-collar boxing to be banned (Lockley, 2017). For Rick, therefore, it is ideal to match fights in such a way that, visually, they do not look like a mismatch. In this respect, Rick's five stone weight difference example is deliberately extreme: it is a possibility that such a match could be made, and be fair. In practice however, such matches are rarely made with such visibly obvious weight difference between fighters.

White-collar boxing, whilst a consumable, tourist experience, is simultaneously a production process with fight night being the ultimate product. Fight night replicates a world-level, professional boxing event (Chapter 9). For many, the prospect of participating in such an event is what makes this version of the sport attractive. Were the matches to appear immediately mismatched in terms of weight, the event would cease to look professional, meaning that this attractive element of white-collar boxing would be diminished. The product looking professional is therefore important.

Whilst for the men at Shadcote Boxing Club, that sparring is a match-making exercise is not announced. This differed for the women. There being fewer women than men at the club, potential matches are few and far between. The women were therefore told prior to the weigh-in who they would be fighting. This is discussed further in Chapter 8. For now, however, the following interview extract from Lucy further indicates that a professional performance is important in the terms above.

EW: okay. So, do you know who you're fighting then?

Lucy: I think it's gonna be Rachel.

EW: why do you think that?

Lucy: 'cos we had a chat with Rick about, the two of us, Rick explained that he's finding it difficult to match the girls up anyway because we're all different heights, shapes, weights, abilities, skill levels, styles, um, we had quite a nice little spar

session that actually *looked* quite good, you gotta remember that ultimately what we're doing is putting on a show, for people.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This chapter explored sparring undertaken by white-collar boxers in preparation for fight night. This is a core component of white-collar boxing training, not least because, unlike other forms of the sport, it is directly implicated in the match-making process for fight night. Sparring is an exercise through which pugilistic knowledge becomes embodied, and whilst it approximates the conditions of a boxing match, pure domination is not its aim. Rather, equilibrium is required. Sparring partners must work together.

White-collar boxers do not become highly-skilled in the art of pugilism in eight weeks. However, through practice, they do come to embody the core dispositions necessary to fight. This process is not the same for all involved. White-collar boxers all enter the gym novices in terms of the sport and therefore in terms of purposefully crafted pugilistic habituses. In other contemporary sociological accounts of women boxing it has been reported that women who are new to the sport fear harming their sparring partners. Similar occurred in this research context. Undiscussed in the literature however, is how men negotiate the violence entailed in sparring. This chapter has suggested that fear is not absent, but rather diametrically opposed: women fear hurting others, men fear getting hurt. These fears manifest physically in sparring. Through practice over eight weeks these dispositions are subject to change, strongly suggesting that neither dispositions are natural. This suggests that social life beyond the gym informs what white-collar boxers do when they step inside, as a result of being socialised in a gendered world. Gender is not the only social division informing practice during sparring. There is a minority of Eastern European men in the gym whose approach to sparring differed from their English counterparts. As per everyone at Shadcote, their approach to sparring is locatable in social conditions of existence throughout the life course prior to engagement at Shadcote. The immediacy of their brawling is misrecognised as natural, and is racialised by the English lads.

White-collar boxing is a late-modern consumption experience. For Bauman, identities are only derived through consumption, people are only brought into being through consumption, consumption is no longer gendered and we

do not travel with identity, but through identities. This chapter has suggested that the consumption of white-collar boxing is dependent on socialisation prior to entry to the gym. In this respect, it is wrong to characterise boxing gyms as bastions of solidity in what is otherwise now a liquid world. The manner in which white-collar boxers differently approach sparring on entry to the gym, can be understood as an implication that social divisions beyond the boxing club endure in embodied terms, and that these inform the way in which white-collar boxing is consumed.

## 8. Weigh-in

*'You've all done so well. Eight weeks ago, over eighty people entered the boxing club having never boxed before. Forty of you remain. You've undertaken the gruelling training, stuck it out, whilst others have quit. You should be proud of yourselves. In two days from now, you're going to be having the experience of a lifetime, fighting in front of your friends and family in a glamorous location. It's going to be a great occasion, because of all the hard work you have put in. Give yourselves a round of applause!'* (excerpt from introductory talk to the weigh-in, adapted from field notes, weigh-in 2).

### 8.1 Introduction

The majority of research involved observing white-collar boxers undertake an eight-week beginners' course in boxing. This course is undertaken to ready participants for a boxing match at the end of this course, known as fight night. Fight night takes place on a Sunday, and on the Friday prior to these boxing shows there are weigh-ins. This chapter focuses on these weigh-ins.

Were the date of the weigh-in made available, the dates of the fight nights would be made available too, which risks participants and Shadcote Boxing Club being identifiable. Three weigh-ins were attended as part of this study. Two of these were at Shadcote; the other was in a bar in a city centre. This city was not Redtown, but another city in the Midlands. The weigh-ins have therefore been numbered 1-3, and these do not indicate the date or the order they were attended. References made to them in text will take the following form: (field notes, weigh-in 1/2/3).

The white-collar boxing programme only lasts eight weeks, and the weigh-in is a tiny fraction of this short-term experience, lasting around 30 minutes. This chapter is therefore based on ethnographic data gathered for only approximately 1.5 hours of a six-month ethnography. Time is not necessarily best understood quantitatively, however, but qualitatively (Berger and

Luckmann, 1967; Wexler, 2015). As this chapter will argue, the weigh-in is a highly important aspect of the white-collar boxing process.

Whilst resembling weigh-ins conducted in other forms of the sport, white-collar weigh-ins cannot possibly serve the purpose of ascertaining weight – in white-collar boxing, matches are not made on weight (Chapter 7). The question is therefore raised: why do weigh-ins exist in white-collar boxing? The white-collar weigh-in is theorised as a ritual through which the matches for fight night, secret up until this point in the programme, are revealed. This revelation also serves as a ritual through which fighters can sustain the illusion of being a pro, via their public announcement by their newly-selected fight names. White-collar boxing seeks to reproduce the idealised experience of being a pro, and undertaking a weigh-in is part of this experience, and the weigh-in is a ritual through which training is constructed as the past, and fight night as the present.

## **8.2 Professional Boxing Weigh-ins**

Only one academic account of white-collar boxing exists prior to this one (Trimbur, 2013). Whether weigh-ins figure in white-collar boxing in this other research context is unknown, as the issue is unaddressed. Given that white-collar boxing at Shadcote aims to provide participants with a touristic experience of being a professional, as a means of contextualising this phenomenon, and for lack of other scholarship on white-collar weigh-ins, it is prudent to address how and why weigh-ins are conducted in professional boxing.

In professional boxing, the primary function of a weigh-in is to ascertain that those set to be competing against one another both fall within the agreed weight category (Woodward, 2007). Professional boxing matches are strictly ordered according to weight (Chapter 2). In both amateur and professional boxing if boxers do not 'make weight' for their fights the boxing match will not proceed (or in professional boxing, may proceed with a penalty). At weigh-ins boxers must also produce medical records to ensure they are safe to fight (Heiskanen, 2006).

Whilst overall this thesis does not concern professional boxing, one pro, interviewed as part of this study, reflected on his professional boxing weigh-ins:

'Normally, you turn up [...] on the day [of the fight]. You weigh in in front of the British Boxing Board of Control member, who's there to make sure there's no way there's any cheating or anything going off [...] normally, it's in a changing room or a squash court with about twenty blokes, in your boxer shorts [...] However, if it's a title fight you weigh in the day before, um, that's normally public, on the scales'.

This extract suggests that many professional boxing weigh-ins are low-key affairs. Similar is reported in Sugden (1996) and Wacquant (2004). This interview extract also, however, rudimentarily highlights that for more significant boxing events, those where a title is at stake, weigh-ins occur in public, and on the day prior to the event (Sugden, 1996). These weigh-ins, in being public, are not so low-key. As Heiskanen (2012: 67) notes, public, pre-fight events contain a 'buzz'. Depending on the magnitude of the title at stake, media personnel will often be present at such weigh-ins, with world-title fights in particular being globally broadcast. For instance, prior to the World Heavyweight title fight between Anthony Joshua and Wladimir Klitschko (held at Wembley Stadium, London, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2017), *The Sun* (Hutchinson, 2017) published an online article detailing the date, time and location of the weigh-in, and how the public could watch it. The strapline for this article is: 'The heavyweight showdown is set for this Saturday at Wembley, but first all eyes will be on the weigh-in' (Hutchinson, 2017: 1).

Heiskanen (2006) notes that such public events transcend nominal purpose. For instance, they serve as a platform for other 'agendas', such as the advertising of fight sponsors. As Heiskanen (2012: 67) notes elsewhere: 'for members of the media, the weigh-in is where the publicity hype is built for audiences'. Though referred to in-passing in existing boxing scholarship (e.g. Sugden, 1996: 85), analysis of such high-end weigh-ins is scant, bar that by Heiskanen (2006, 2012). For the lack of detailed, scholarly analysis of the minutia of public, professional weigh-ins, basic primary analysis of televised weigh-ins of world-level pro boxing can be conducted so as to provide an approximate understanding of the form that public weigh-ins take (e.g. iFLTV, 2015; FightFanCom, 2011; FightHype, 2017).

These events take the following approximate form: a master of ceremonies (henceforth MC) will welcome the audience and introduce the event, then turn to announce the boxer by name – including ring names e.g. Adrien 'The Problem' Broner – and credentials, in terms of where they are from and



their boxing record. The boxer then walks to the scales at the front of a stage, partially clothed. This weight is recorded by at least one official. Who this is differs depending on the title at stake *e.g.* if a World Boxing Organisation (WBO) title is on the line, a WBO official will be present and the MC will announce this weight to the crowd. Whilst this is occurring, the boxer gestures to the crowd in various capacities, typically raising their fists, flexing their muscles. During all the above, the crowd will applaud and cheer.

Once both boxers have undertaken this routine, they meet centre-stage for face-off photos. Swain's (2011) doctoral research on MMA and particularly the premium MMA organisation the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) – which shares with boxing the weigh-in phenomenon – can be drawn upon here: 'two fighters stood face-to-face and each assumed a fight pose. This is formulaic within combat sports, and is done at UFC weigh-ins, as well as in boxing' (Swain, 2011: 123). Woodward (2014: 118) briefly notes that 'taunts and insults... often mark the weigh-in'. Indeed, at this juncture, the boxers may 'trash talk'. LoConto and Roth (2005: 215) argue that 'the goal [of trash-talk] is to demean opponents and cause enough imbalance to diminish their performance'. Equally, the scholars also note that there is an element of dramatic performance to trash-talking, as have others (Heiskanen, 2012). In this respect Boddy (2008: 348) notes of Muhammad Ali – a famous trash-talker – 'never mind the ring... every chat show, press conference and weigh-in became a space for oratory as well as theatre'. Indeed, Ali's trash-talking has been likened to poetry and hip-hop freestyling (Danner, 2006; TEDx Talks, 2013).

Woodward (2007: 119) notes '[t]he most visible aspects of boxing are associated with men and with a particular version of heroic masculinity'. The public weigh-ins, along with fights they precede, are arguably the most visible aspect of boxing. From the limited scholarship available, gender, and particularly masculinity order practice at such public weigh-ins. If toiling in the seclusion of 'downtown backstreet' (Woodward, 2014: 77) gyms is undertaken for 'the production and validation of a public (hyper)masculine self' (Wacquant, 1995a: 491), the public weigh-in is a site wherein this public self can be presented. Woodward (2014: 118), again in passing, notes that public weigh-ins can be characterised as 'exaggerated caricature' based on the performance of 'excessive version of masculinity'.

Paradis (2012: 100) discusses the 'hysteresis' characterising weigh-ins for female boxers. It should be noted that Paradis refers only to 'unofficial

weigh-ins' (101) held in the gym, which women purposefully avoid, rather than the public weigh-ins with which this section is overall concerned. For lack of other scholarship on how women's weigh-ins are conducted, it is worth engaging with this content. Hysteresis is a relatively unelaborated Bourdieusian concept pertaining to 'the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them' (Bourdieu, 1977a: 83). Paradis has been heavily criticised for misappropriating Bourdieu's concepts, including hysteresis. Wacquant (2014a: 126) has noted that Paradis:

'confuses hysteresis, which is a constitutive property of every habitus referring to the built-in lag between the time it is forged and the moment it is activated... with an empirical 'misalignment between habitus and doxa that makes agents feel out of place and out of sync' (Paradis, 2012: 84).

Whilst the application of theory may not be to Wacquant's taste, Paradis's account remains useful: 'women use a range of tactics: they weigh themselves at home, take the scale into the bathroom as they change, or weigh themselves fully clothed and subtract pounds for clothing' (Paradis, 2012: 101). Paradis (2012: 100) locates this action as the result 'a major preoccupation' with weight 'in the broader American culture'. This can be taken as a further suggestion that weigh-ins are a (hyper)gendered phenomenon. As Paradis (2012: 104) notes, whilst women are not corporeally excluded from the sport: 'the hypermasculine mythology... of boxing has not fully been displaced by egalitarian beliefs', and this remains figurative of weigh-in practices.

It should be noted that public weigh-ins are rare. As Sugden (1996: 51) states: for every 'world-ranked contender... there are thousands taking fights at the base of the pyramid'. The weigh-ins undertaken by those fighting professionally for 'three figure sums' (Sugden, 1996: 51) or perhaps more likely today in the British context, four-figure sums, are not public or depicted in the media (as is also the case for amateur boxing weigh-ins). Boxing is only partially represented in the media, in that it is the relatively few world-ranked fighters regularly represented and not those at the base of the pyramid (Woodward, 2014). Most media content representing boxing weigh-ins are between world-ranked contenders, and if not world-ranked contenders, those otherwise competing for prestigious titles in the pro boxing world. This therefore does not reflect most of the boxing weigh-ins

that occur in practice. Public weigh-ins are reserved for those at the pinnacle of the professional dimension of sport.

In summary, in professional boxing weight divisions are strict and are primarily undertaken to ensure that boxing matches are fair and safe. Weigh-ins may serve other purposes too, and can be symbolic of wider social dynamics ordering the practice of boxing. Weigh-ins for boxing matches between boxers nearing or at the pinnacle of the sport are held in public and are hypergendered and often – being that the sport is mostly undertaken by men (Oates, 2006, Woodward, 2007) – hypermasculine displays. Without their weight-checking function however, weigh-ins would not occur. Indeed, most weigh-ins take place on the day of the fight in private settings, are not public, and occur entirely for this instrumental purpose.

### **8.3 White-Collar Boxing Weigh-ins**

#### **8.3.1 The Order of Events of White-Collar Weigh-ins**

White-collar boxing weigh-ins occur in the following way: on the Friday night prior to fight night, those fighting arrive at the weigh-in location. In this research, these were Shadcote Boxing Club, and a bar. Some bring friends and family, though largely weigh-ins are attended only by the white-collar, Shadcote staff, one or two club lads and a White-Collar Boxing Ltd representative. Once all are present, all gather near the weighing scales, which become the focal point for the event. In the case of the weigh-in at the bar the scales were on a small stage, in the case of the boxing club, they were on the gym floor. There is a brief introductory talk given by one of the Shadcote staff and/or White-Collar Boxing Ltd, who also acts as the MC. Following this, fights are announced: fighters' names are called by the MC, at which point they will walk out from the crowd and stand on the scales facing the crowd, have their weight measured and announced. They pose for photographs whilst standing on the scales (typically in a fighting pose, or one displaying their physique, such as flexing their biceps). Their opponent then undergoes the same sequence. These fighters then 'face off' against one another, standing toe-to-toe in boxing stance, typically staring into each other's eyes, whilst further photographs are taken. At this stage, there may be trash talk. After the face off, fighters shake hands and return to the crowd. This sequence of events is repeated until all those due to be fighting have undertaken it.

Considering that weigh-ins are an established part of boxing and weigh-ins as they are presented in the media take this approximate form (Heiskanen, 2006; Wacquant, 2004; Sugden, 1996; Paradis, 2012) there is little that is immediately unusual about the fact that white-collar boxing events are preceded by weigh-ins described above. If you wandered in to a white-collar boxing weigh-in, given that boxers are usually required to weigh in prior to fighting, in all likelihood you would assume that a weigh-in was occurring. However, the 'first wisdom of sociology' is that 'in social life things are not what they seem' (Berger, 1963: 34). As demonstrated at multiple points in this thesis, this is certainly the case with white-collar boxing. The title given to the phenomenon obscures its own reality (Chapter 6). Similarly, weigh-ins in white-collar boxing have purposes obscured from immediate understanding given their title and immediately perceptible conduct. Indeed, the name given to these events (*i.e.* weigh-in) is actively misleading.

### **8.3.2 Weigh-ins where Weight does not Matter**

As discussed in Chapter 7, in the eight weeks leading up to the weigh-in the Shadcote staff have matched the white-collar boxers for fight night, primarily based on monitoring and assessing sparring. Weight in white-collar boxing is of limited significance, and matches are not ordered in the strict terms as is the case in amateur and professional boxing. As one participant articulated, in white-collar boxing 'if you're ten pound over, it usually doesn't matter. If you're a few pound under, few pound over. Mostly, the fights are matched on ability, uh, as well as weight'. Whilst my field diary from one weigh-in notes that the weights of white-collar boxers are 'mostly bang on' (field notes, weigh-in 2) meaning both fighters weighed the same or very similar, weights are ultimately inconsequential and have no bearing as to whether fights will proceed.

Given that matches are not made on weight only, the purpose of white-collar weigh-ins necessarily differs therefore from their purpose in the majority of boxing. As noted with Heiskanen (2006, 2012) above, weigh-ins can serve other purposes too, in addition to their instrumental purpose: the promotion of sponsors' products for instance. White-collar boxing is on the margins of the mainstream boxing economy, and a lowly version of the sport in comparison to the heights of televised professional boxing, product promotion is also lacking in this context (Chapter 5). Given that white-collar

weigh-ins do not serve this purpose either, and the stated primary purpose is lacking (*i.e.* they are weigh-ins where weight is not being recorded for any administrative purpose) the question of why weigh-ins occur at all in white-collar boxing is necessarily raised. Social forms do not manifest at random and are never without meaning (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). White-collar weigh-ins must be meaningful in some capacity, otherwise Shadcote Boxing Club and White-Collar Boxing Ltd would cease to include them.

EW: So, the weigh-ins for white-collar events then [...] What's the purpose of them d'you think?... 'cos the weight, they're not matched on weight?

[...]

Rick: It's [the weigh-in is] not something that's necessarily the club's idea, they used to be a pain. Now, we do them at the club and it's fine. [...] Yep, I think it's purely for the overall window-dressing of the event. Give them the feeling that they're doing, they've done the training, they've had the weigh-in, they're having a fight.

Rick engages in white-collar boxing as a means of being involved in boxing without having to abide by boxing authority regulations (Chapter 5). He does not necessarily embrace wholeheartedly the weigh-ins required by White-Collar Boxing Ltd. Initially, White-Collar Boxing Ltd had insisted that white-collar weigh-ins attended by trainees from Shadcote be held in glamorous locations. Rick negotiated with White-Collar Boxing Ltd, however, and now white-collar boxers trained at Shadcote also weigh-in at Shadcote. In this respect, the weigh-ins held at Shadcote Boxing Club are slightly understated affairs, in comparison to the other weigh-in held at an upmarket wine bar.

As well as indicating his hesitancy to participate in the weigh-ins, and indicating further that the weigh-ins are part of the touristic experience, rather than a functional necessity – in Rick's terms 'window-dressing' – contained within Rick's statement above is an implicit understanding of the intersubjective social construction of time (Luckmann, 1991) and the qualitative experience of being in and of time in white-collar boxing: as Rick notes the weigh-in produces the feeling of the training being 'done' and likewise the 'feeling' that they are having a fight. This change is facilitated by the weigh-in. In other words, the weigh-in is a ritual.

#### **8.4 The White-Collar Weigh-in as Ritual**

My field diary entry for weigh-in 1 describes the event as a 'ritual'. This can be extended to all the weigh-ins attended during fieldwork, all following the same format. To explain further: ritual is derived from the Latin *ritus* meaning religious ceremony or custom. Whilst sport is recurrently located as a replacement for religion in the post-secular world (Eitzen and Sage, 1992; Roche, 2000) and boxing has been referred to in quasi-religious terms (Wacquant, 2005), contemporary uses of the term ritual no longer necessarily have theistic implications whilst retaining meaning as ceremony (Collins, 2004; Seligman *et al.* 2008). It was in this approximate capacity that I used the term, due to the repetitious procedural format of weigh-ins. Repetition is a component of ritual action (Seligman *et al.* 2008), and weigh-ins follow a strict format: one fighter takes to the scales, photographs are taken, their opponent does the same, they face off and more photos are taken, both fighters return to the crowd, and the process is repeated, until all fighters have undertaken it.

Whilst the term ritual is employed here in secular terms, the meaning originating in the religious use of the term described above (actions as a means of passage from one state to another) is, however, retained. Religious rituals might include being ordained as a priest, though as Van Gannep (1909/1960) has noted, other rites of passage share with ordainment transition from one state to another, but lack a religious dimension. These might include various forms of coming of age, birth and death. University graduation ceremonies are another example (Barthold, 2016). Drawing upon Van Gannep, Turner (1974:56) accordingly notes rituals exist for 'accompanying the change in social status of an individual or a cohort of individuals'. Adding to this, Maruna (2011) notes that rituals mark and are instrumental in producing the passage of time. Through rituals existent social orders are rendered the past and new social orders are established *i.e.* a new present is forged. The ritual itself, however, belongs to neither (Marshall, 2002; Turner, 1977).

It is often suggested that rituals provide passage from one stable, ordered state to another (*e.g.* Collins, 2004; Turner, 1977). Summers-Effler (2006: 135), for instance, notes rituals contain action through which social order is made, and that rituals are 'the most basic structural force that organizes

society'. Seligman *et al.* (2008), however, contest this conventional understanding of ritual. For these scholars, whilst facilitating the passage of time and serving to construct meaningful social situations, ritual activity does not produce stable social organisation. Rather, ritual activity constructs 'a subjunctive universe' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 21). A subjunctive universe is a 'world where possibilities are acted out' (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 29), which stands in contradistinction to 'everyday world' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 28). If everyday reality can be understood as the world 'as is' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 81), then the subjunctive operates according to what could possibly be. For Seligman *et al.* (2008: 25) 'a central aspect of ritual action' is 'the creation of "as if" worlds', otherwise referred to as 'what if' or 'could be' worlds' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 23). Rituals may be 'reality-maintaining procedures' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 175), but the reality being maintained here is a subjunctive reality:

Rick: What is the purpose of them? The purpose of them is created by White-Collar Boxing Ltd purely for the dramatics of the event to make them feel like they have the whole experience.

For Seligman *et al.* (2008) the subjunctive should be understood in distinction to the 'sincere'. For these scholars, to act sincerely is to act in discordance with the subjunctive universe. For instance, workplace managers often operate under the 'illusion' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 22) that they are friends with co-workers, and not really their boss, though when an employee does something the manager dislikes the pretence may be broken, the manager ceases to act as friend, but as manager. That is, the manager reverts to sincerity, and in so doing reveals the 'as is' hierarchy insincerely masked. It is proffered that in interview, on the topic of the weigh-in, Rick was speaking sincerely in these terms. Seligman *et al.* (2008: 104) note that 'sincerity often grows out of reaction against ritual', and as noted in the previous section, according to Rick the weigh-in is not 'necessarily something that's the club's idea'. Whereas at the weigh-ins themselves, everyone operates as though a purpose of the event is to ascertain the weights of those fighting, in interview Rick acknowledged this is not the case. Moreover, through doing so Rick allowed for the further understanding; the weigh-in occurs for producing a subjunctive reality, allowing in dramatic terms for 'the whole experience' to be consumed.

White-collar boxing is concerned with offering complete beginners the experience of being a professional boxer, in idealised terms. White-collar

boxers undertake a short-term programme in boxing training to ready them for fight night, wherein they can experience what it is like to have a professional title fight. The weigh-in can therefore be understood as ritual action, through which a scenario is produced 'as if' a weigh-in is happening, as part of the touristic experience of being a professional boxer.

The weigh-in constructs a subjunctive universe wherein participants become professional boxers in insincere terms. It should be noted that weigh-ins serve another purpose hitherto unaddressed. It is through weigh-ins that white-collar boxers find out who they are fighting on fight night. The weigh-in also serves the purpose of revelation, and through revelation, the subjunctive universe of white-collar boxing is further upheld.

#### **8.4.1 Revelation**

*Various people ask me if I know who they're fighting. I say I do. They ask me not to tell them. I don't. Why bother asking then? They want to know but want to go through the ritual (field notes, weigh-in 1).*

As Nigel stated in interview, the process of matchmaking is 'secretive' (Nigel, interview). White-collar boxers enter Shadcote Boxing Club opponentless, but with the view to fight at the end of the eight-week course. Throughout this course staff at Shadcote monitor the progress of each white-collar boxer and eventually pair them up against one another; this is largely through observation of sparring (Chapter 7). This information, however, once established by Shadcote, is withheld from white-collar boxers throughout the process. If it were made known who was fighting whom at an early stage of the training camp, Shadcote Boxing Club would be a tense environment, and difficult to manage.

However, this uncertainty is itself a source of a different tension. Many participants articulated that from the moment they entered Shadcote Boxing Club for the introductory meeting they had been observing the other white-collars, trying to gain an idea of who they may or may not be fighting. For example: Elliot stated in interview, in response to the question 'have you got any idea about who you're fighting yet?':



Elliot: um, I've got, it's too early days to say really, but um, I mean there's a couple of lads that um are of the same build that I've been lookin' at.

Though those involved sometimes realise this is a purpose of their sparring, it is rarely publicly articulated purpose of the exercise (Chapter 7). The weigh-in is therefore a demystifying experience, where it is announced who is fighting whom for the first time. In this respect, regarding why they were looking forward to the weigh-in, white-collar boxers stated in interviews variations on the following:

Matt: Yeah, it'll be good. It'll be good to see who I'm fighting and it turns to reality then, you realise that it's a couple of days away and you know who you're fighting and you're at that weigh-in, you know it's nearly there and you're nearly at that point, so, yeah, it'll be good.

Jack: I think I'm just excited about that [the weigh-in], once I've found out who it is [that I am fighting] and that's that, I can think about it [the fight] from there, but I'm still, I'm still at that thing now where I don't know who it is yet.

The weigh-ins serve as revelations through which white-collar boxers find out who they will be fighting. As Matt, quoted above, enunciated, it is through this that the fight becomes a 'reality'. Up until the weigh-in for most participants their opponent is unknown and this ritual reveals them in their fleshy materiality. Given, moreover, that the weigh-ins are held less than two days prior to fight night itself, the revelation of an opponent, in the flesh, gives the fight a palpable imminence.

Most interviews were conducted during the eight-week boxing course with participants who had never boxed before, and therefore prior to their experience of being at a weigh-in. Therefore, little interview data was collected pertaining to how fighters actually experienced the weigh-in. However, data from those interviewed after their fights corroborates this account. Reflecting on his experience of the weigh-in, Tim noted the following:

Tim: Yeah, I didn't mind the weigh-in. Uh, I think, I enjoyed it, it also got me pretty fired up. I was ready for it after that. It was less 'what's gonna happen?' and more 'focus on what I've gotta do'. It kind of focussed my mind I think.

As per other participants' accounts above, in this extract Tim articulated a removal of uncertainty through his opponent being revealed. Tim's account also indicates a reconstruction of time and in conjunction with this meaning and feeling. Post-weigh-in, fight night is understood as an impending inevitability. Before the weigh-in he wondered what was going to happen, whereas post-weigh-in he understood his fight as definitely happening, and could consider how to approach it. He also referred to a change in emotion produced – 'being fired up' and 'focussed'. This is all to say that Tim's account suggests he experienced weigh-in a way that made the fight real, and the ritual produced in him emotions that prepared him for this new reality (simultaneously also producing it).

In this respect, the revelation does construct a 'sincere' reality. As Seligman *et al.* (2008: 128) note 'human civilisations oscillate between' and 'combine' sincerity and ritual 'in various ways', and whilst the weigh-in is clearly an exercise of insincerity, in that it is not really a weigh-in at all, it also produces an unavoidable truth: these people will be fighting one another in just under two days' time. There is an obvious, corporeal reality to fight night. Beneath the meanings with which fight night is recurrently imbued – that it is akin to a title fight in professional boxing – two people are ultimately still in the ring, slugging it out. The weigh-in brings this to the fore too:

Simon: My opponent got called out first, and I thought, 'god, I feel sorry for whoever's fighting him' [...] and then my name got called out. [...] I thought 'shit, I'm fighting him'.

The way this revelation occurs can also be understood as ritual through which white-collar boxers are constructed, insincerely so, as professional fighters. In this respect, a different event could take the place of the weigh-in, wherein there was no façade of a weigh-in taking place, but retained the purpose of announcing who is fighting who, and therein constructing the sincere reality of the fight. Indeed, there is no requirement for an event *per se* at all to do this, as reflected in how female white-collar boxers in this study were told of whom they were due to fight. As discussed in the previous chapter they were unceremoniously told during sparring. Another alternative to a weigh-in could be publishing these details online prior to the event, or even just pinning a piece of paper up in the club for all to see. That this revelation takes a ritual form – approximating a weigh-in – is no coincidence. It is a meaningful practice, through which the identity of a professional boxer can be performed in subjunctive terms.

#### **8.4.2 Becoming the Bomber?**

At the weigh-in the fights are revealed one by one, and each time a fighter is called to the scales they are individually applauded and cheered. When white-collar boxers are individually called out of the crowd to be weighed, they are announced not only by their names, but also by ring names. Whilst white-collar boxers choose their names in the weeks running up to fight night and are submitted to White-Collar Boxing Ltd, who print them on vests for the white-collar boxers to wear during their matches, the weigh-in is the first point at which they are publicly referenced in such a capacity.

Pilcher (2016: 765) notes 'the names we have are at the nucleus of our individual identity'. It is for this reason that a standard procedure in sociological research is to anonymise participants. It is also for the reason that names are at the core of our individual identity, however, that makes the adoption of ring names relevant to this study. Discussion of ring names brings therefore produces an unusual ethical issue: it is difficult to do so without revealing participants' identities. These names are publicly announced both at the weigh-in and at fight night alongside fighters' real names, and to all intents and purposes should therefore be treated as their real names. The following is a brief typology of ring names, presented using either examples from professional boxing or fiction as a proxy for the real ring names of white-collar boxers, as a means of conveying meaning without revealing the identities of participants.

Thematically, white-collar boxing ring names vary. Some draw upon, or borrow directly from famous boxers' ring names (real and fictional) e.g. 'Iron' (as in Iron Mike Tyson) and 'Rocky Balboa' or 'Raging Bull'. Woodward (2007) notes that boxing is often discussed via military terminology and through this it is masculinized. In this regard numerous famous professional boxers have adopted the name 'Bomber', for instance: Herol 'Bomber' Graham and Tony 'Bomber' Bellew. Variations on Bomber are a popular choice of ring name and there tends to be at least one Bomber at every white-collar event. More often, whilst not borrowing directly from professional boxers, many ring names are rooted in similar terminology and imagery, for example: Tank, Sledgehammer, Warrior, Assassin.

Some ring names are a play on white-collar boxers' real names. This may take the form of using one's name for an alternate meaning applied to the word to give it meaning similar to the above. An example from fiction in this

respect would be Rocky Balboa's opponent in *Rocky V*, whose name was Tommy Gunn and ring name was Tommy 'the Machine' Gunn. Nicknames based on wordplay might also be alliterative or rhyming, in addition to signifying tough masculinity: Shannon 'the Cannon' Briggs being an example from the world of professional boxing.

The types of ring names described above constitute the majority of those chosen by white-collar boxers. To a lesser extent some other types of names are chosen. Some are *prima facie* inexplicable: interviews suggest, however, references to idiosyncratic features of white-collar boxers' lives and/or their nicknames outside the ring. For instance: Johnny 'the Ketchup' Davies, called this because there was that one time where this funny thing happened between him and a bottle of tomato sauce that his friends won't let him forget about. Similarly, some ring names were comically 'self-deprecating' (field notes, weigh-in 2). A white-collar boxer might call themselves 'the Human Punchbag' implying they are good for nothing apart from being hit and are therefore going to lose their fight. These types of names may be a pre-emptive adaptation to the possibility of failure (Goffman, 1952). Should the Ketchup lose, he can say he was clearly only doing it for a laugh, and should the Human Punchbag lose, they can claim to have fulfilled the prophecy (Merton, 1948).

The comic themes discussed above should not be overstated. Many white-collar boxers would not stand for being announced by such a name. One participant, for instance, initially delegated the task of ring name selection to his children, who after some deliberation produced a name based on a children's cartoon. He rejected this name, however, and settled on a name that can be understood within the military theme discussed above. This participant decided to reject the initial nickname, instead selecting a name drawing upon weapon imagery, through which a subjunctive identity of self-as-pro could be performed. Similarly, in this regard, if white-collar boxers fail to submit their ring name in time to be printed on their vest, come fight night, regardless of how they are announced at the weigh-in, they are provided with a ring name, usually of this variety, which further suggests that White-Collar Boxing Ltd aim to produce an experience wherein practitioners can act as if they are a pro.

Adams (2009: 81) notes 'nicknames can be imposed, or they can be used by agreement between namer and named'. Nicknames are often earned or given, though rarely self-selected. As Koehn (2006: 3) notes, there is a 'lack

of research on the self-selection of nicknames', and given the statement from Adams, above, this is arguably because self-selection of nicknames rarely occurs as a first-order practice. Given that Bauman (1996, 2004) has noted identity has become a project, and, as Pilcher (2016) notes, names are at the core of identity, that white-collar boxers select their own nicknames may 'seem' (Berger, 1963: 34) to indicate that white-collar boxing is a liquid-modern identity project. On closer inspection, however, this is not the case.

Were you feeling particularly mean, you could attend a white-collar weigh-in, and at every point that someone was announced as 'Bomber' you could shout 'you're not really the Bomber, though, are you?!'. Whether you would make it out unscathed is debatable, but even if you did not, you would still have disrupted the ritual action undertaken to ensure that the weigh-in looks 'as if' a pro boxer is weighing in. It would herald a reversion to the sincere world in which Al 'the Bomber' Townsend, for instance, is 'just' Al Townsend. In other words, these 'everyday' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 28) names remain the sincere identity of those weighing in, whilst the subjunctive is being consumed. These sincere names are imposed upon white-collar boxers, just as, for most people their names are imposed upon them. People are not tasked with producing their own name. They are, to borrow generously from Marx (1852/2005), given and inherited. Moreover, names are signifiers not only of individual identity, but of social identity. As Lindsay and Dempsey (2017) note, names signify social class and gender. Pilcher (2016) has noted similar.

Rhodes (2011: 360) notes that white, working-class boxers, both real (e.g. Ricky Hatton) and fictional (e.g. Rocky Balboa) are represented in popular media as embodying 'a specific form of "respectable" white working-class masculine identity'. As reflects the overarching ethos of Shadcote Boxing Club, white-collar boxers are mostly white, English, working-class men, who invest in both the body and nation as a means of identity. This, for instance, coalesces via ink-on-white-skin: most men in the gym have the word England tattooed on them, sometimes indeed in Old English font, and often these tattoo designs also contain St George's crosses. At the weigh-in, these men put their bodies on display and are celebrated for doing so, through being constructed ritualistically as if they are professional boxers, via the adoption of ring-names. White-collar boxing, in being a commodified reproduction of the idealised experience of being a professional boxer, which

one can consume through active participation, allows white-collar lads to consume the respect given to boxing 'heroes'.

For Bauman (2005: 26) it is a 'brute unquestionable fact that one needs to be a consumer first, before becoming anything in particular'. This is not, however, an unquestionable fact, and this analysis suggests that identity formed outside of consumption informs the qualitative experience of consumption. What looks like the archetypal liquid-modern experience can be better understood as insincere performance of the identity of champion boxer. The desire to consume self in these terms is locatable at the intersections of class, white-nationalism and masculinity. It is not through the weigh-in that participants become identifiable *in* these terms, it is rather that through this performative consumption white-collar boxers get respect *on* these terms. Given that fight night is the end of the eight-week production line, the pinnacle of the white-collar boxing experience, Chapter 9 will discuss this further.

#### **8.4.3 Staging the Subjunctive**

Boxing, with professional boxing being the pinnacle of the sport, requires embodied knowledge (Garcia and Spencer, 2013), a 'practical mastery' (Bourdieu, 1977b: 647), developed through long-term 'discipline' (Wacquant, 2004: 44). Indeed, discipline has two meanings: as a synonym for academic field of study, and as a synonym for punishment. Foucault (1991, 1980a) was interested in knowledge as a means of regulating bodies: the panopticon as a house of punishment operates through rendering its inmates knowable (Foucault, 1991). Discipline shares its etymology with disciple, and acknowledging this allows for further understanding as to why Wacquant (2005) has referred to boxing in religious terms. A disciple is one who dedicates their life to following a particular body of knowledge or thought. This entails passion, in terms of simultaneous 'love and suffering' (Wacquant, 1995a: 492): punishing the body via engagement within a corporeally-challenging knowledge regime as a means of becoming a 'man of strength', but also a 'man of virtue' (Wacquant, 1995a: 513). Through continued, dedicated practice according to the strict regime that amateur and professional boxing training entails, boxers 'literally fashion themselves into a new being' (Wacquant, 1995a: 501).

White-collar boxers are not disciples, having undertaken but eight weeks' training in a fighting discipline, the mastery of which takes years of training (Sugden, 1985; Wacquant, 2004). Some limited developments occur in terms of the development of pugilistic habitus: through negotiation of violence, different dispositions are produced in terms of willingness to hit others in the face, and to accept being hit in the face (Chapter 7). Undoubtedly, however, white-collar boxers do not form a pugilistic habitus in the same terms as professional boxers. The weigh-in therefore amounts to a scenario wherein agents unendowed with pugilistic capital in comparison to professional boxers experience a weigh-in of the type usually the preserve not only of professional boxers, but the *crème de la crème* of professional boxers.

Being a professional boxer does not only entail embodying knowledge through practice in such a capacity that one can compete proficiently within the rules of the sport. As discussed above, becoming a professional boxer entails a social transformation: a literal transformation in terms of being in the world. As discussed above, professional weigh-ins follow a certain order, and require practitioners to behave in certain ways. Just as it has been argued that Ali's trash-talking skills were like musical performance, which requires knowledge being put to work (Faulkner and Becker, 2009), so do these elements of the weigh-in require bodily proficiency. Professional weigh-ins may be performances, but underpinning these performances is technical proficiency. Actors – in the sense of those performing on the stage *e.g.* Judi Dench, Brian Blessed – require lessons or training in acting. Even for the most experienced actors, the public stage requires negotiation (Scott, 2017). They cannot just do it, even if it seems to come naturally.

As Barthold (2016: 138) notes, 'central' to Seligman's understanding of ritual is the way in which 'it provides an account of action that does not assume mastery and a sincere subject'. Indeed, this is the case at the white-collar weigh-ins. At the weigh-in white-collar boxers are required to act 'as if' they are undertaking a public, professional boxing weigh-in, having never undertaken a professional boxing weigh-in. Whilst some do have the physique, approximately speaking, of professional boxers, they do not embody the dispositions that facilitate the successful performance of the majority of public weigh-ins in professional boxing.

When male white-collar boxers are called to the stage they perform, mimetically, according to the actions undertaken by professional boxers at

title fights. As described in 8.3.1, male white-collar boxers adopted tough and muscle-flexing poses at the weigh-ins. This necessarily draws upon an implicit preconception of how boxers *should* operate, *i.e.* according to media representations of televised weigh-ins for professional title fights. These are therefore performances ordered according to the hypermasculine field/habitus of professional boxing (Wacquant, 2004) but lacking the long-term practice through which this way of being in the world is formed. Equally, to ensure the subjunctive remains intact, this performance of pugilistic hypermasculinity is guided by those running the event.

The weigh-in, as noted earlier in this chapter, is formulaic, and this formula is drip-fed to those involved. This is done, however, in such a way that sustains the subjunctive – it is not immediately obvious that white-collars weighing in are being told what to do. The order of these instructions is as follows: the white-collars, via the MC, are called to the scales via their ring name, instructed to stand on the scales, told to pose for photographs whilst on the scales thereby initiating the posturing like the pros do. They are told to face off against one another. Trash talk is actively encouraged by the MC during the face-off – ‘Any fighting talk for your opponent?’ (field notes, weigh-in 1) – though not in every face-off. Doing so would arguably make it obvious that a formula was being followed. The trash talking tends not to be too poetic – unsurprising given it is likely they will have never trash-talked before, this being their first ever boxing weigh-in – though by following this cue the performance is maintained: white-collars can consume the experience of being a pro, through performing ‘as if’ they were a pro. By following these cues, they can do so without the requisite mastery, but without reverting to the world of sincerity. Whilst performing as Rocky, the white-collar boxer is a rookie.

### **8.5 Women, White-Collar Weigh-ins, and Sincerity**

Much of the above has concerned male white-collar boxers. The lack of post-weigh-in interview data with women is a drawback of this study, particularly regarding their experiences of the weigh-in. However, a major difference between men and the women at white-collar weigh-ins is that women’s weights are not announced. This was the case at all the weigh-ins attended during this study. For male white-collar boxers, weights are announced even though these weights have no bearing on whether the forthcoming fights



will proceed. At none of the weigh-ins attended as part of this research, however, were the weights of female white-collar boxers announced. 'Rachel looks perplexed when this happened, whilst still standing on the scales, asked what it was' (field notes, weigh-in 1). The scales in this instance were coin-operated pillar scales – like those sometimes at swimming baths and recreation centres – with a clock-like dial. Ordinarily were you to weigh yourself on such a set of scales, you would be facing that dial. Due to the nature of this event, however, the fighters were required to stand on the scales facing away from the dial towards the crowd and photographer. Rachel therefore could not see her weight, but expected it to be announced. Similar occurred at the other weigh-ins. For instance, at weigh-in 3, rather than the weights of female white-collars being announced, the announcement as they stood on the scales was: 'Weighing in at 'a good weight!' (field notes, weigh-in 3). Body weight, particularly for women (Cordell and Ronai, 2017), is constructed as a sensitive issue in many areas of social life. Sport and exercise contexts are prime sites for this construction (Paradis, 2012), but by no means are they the only sites for this construction (Bordo, 1993). In other words, the weigh-ins operated according to a gendered understanding of bodies that exists outside the boxing club, but is reproduced and sustained within it.

During one of the weigh-ins, I was in the crowd amongst the white-collars, watching as pair after pair were called out to the front to be weighed and face off against one another. As two female white-collar boxers hugged for the photographs, rather than sternly facing off in boxing stances, some of the lads chatted amongst themselves: '[they] can't understand why the women want to hug someone when they are going to fight them. But they say it is different for them' (adapted from field notes, weigh-in 2). Exactly what the lads perceived this difference to be was unarticulated. However, the lads' discussion was based on perceiving different behaviour surrounding the weigh-in from the women than the men that does occur. The following field note demonstrates this further:

'The women all sit on the bench separately. All the lads standing. They [the women] are far more friendly with each other about it [the weigh-in]. Hugging for the face-off photo' (field notes, weigh-in 1).

At this weigh-in there was a stark spatial gender division (*i.e.* in terms of how bodies were organised in the room). Much of the crowd comprised male

white-collar boxers, gathered around the scales, standing up, mostly looking quite serious and stern. It was quiet, apart from these men occasionally chatting quietly amongst themselves regarding what they thought about each match as it was revealed. The four female white-collar boxers gathered separately, however, not as part of the crowd who were standing up facing the scales, but sitting on a bench and not facing the weighing scales. Being in the crowd of men and knowing prior to the announcement who the women were each fighting (as did they) I could see that they were all interacting with each other in an amicable manner (chatting, smiling, joking and laughing), including with their opponents, and little attention was being paid towards the weigh-in.

On their fights being announced, the women stood on the scales and were weighed. This was followed by posing for the camera. Unlike the lads, they did not tend to pose in muscular positions and/or grimace. Two women gestured to the camera by doing a 'double-thumbs up' (field notes, weigh-in 1). Rather than posing for the face-off by adopting boxing stances and/or engaging in stare-downs, the women hugged whilst having their photographs taken. This is not the case for all female white-collar boxing weigh-ins, but the gender difference in behaviour in this instance was stark.

The women knew who they were fighting prior to the weigh-in. Match-making occurs through sparring, and whilst for the most part this is not announced for those undertaking the process, it was for the women (Chapter 7). This may not always be the case for women undertaking white-collar boxing, though during this field research it was. This meant the ritualistic revelatory aspect of the weigh-in – through which the male white-collar boxers find out who their opponent is, which facilitates performance of the subjunctive – was unavailable to the women, their opponents having been unceremoniously revealed during sparring. Though the weigh-in is not meaningful in terms that its name seems to imply, the weigh-in remains a meaningful activity for the men in terms of revelation. With this meaning being absent for the women, it is perhaps unsurprising they were not as engaged in the weigh-in as the men. Indeed, though this is not necessarily what was implied by the lads discussing the women at the weigh-in, it was 'different for them' in this regard.

In the absence of interview data on women's perspectives of the weigh-in itself, the following interview extract with Maude can be drawn upon, to shed some light on why the female white-collar boxers at the weigh-in above were

less concerned with the weigh-in than the men. As discussed, white-collar boxers choose ring names, and it is at the weigh-in that they are publicly identified in these terms for the first time. They also choose entrance music (that which during the fighters' walk to the ring is played out over a PA system), and this occurs for much the same reason as the selection of ring names. These phenomena occur to produce the feeling and superficially the appearance of being a professional boxer. When Maude was interviewed she reflected on these facets of white-collar boxing:

EW: And are those two things, name and music, important to you?

Maude: No. I think it would be sad if I didn't have that when it's part of the night, but it won't make a massive difference to how I fight. It's not going to improve my performance.

In other words – in a similar capacity to Rick, as discussed earlier in this chapter – the women are perhaps 'sincere' in terms of Seligman *et al.* (2008). White-collar boxers, regardless of whether they believe in the purpose of the weigh-in or value the experience of undertaking it, are required to do so. Maude's account suggests that she does not value these facets of white-collar boxing through which pugilistic hypermasculinity could be performed. This is not to say that there was lack of belief in the worth of boxing for its actual sporting practice and challenges, but to say that perhaps there was a lack of belief in the need for the hypermasculine theatricality surrounding the weigh-in, unlike the white-collar lads, who were keen to participate in the construction of a subjunctive reality.

The following field note provides some limited further evidence in support of the above argument. It does not refer to a weigh-in, but after a white-collar training session. Whilst white-collar boxers are not referred to by their ring names during the training camp, they are required to select names and submit them to the boxing club staff during the training camp. This is necessary, as on fight night, white-collar boxers wear a vest on which their ring name is printed in the following way: Anthony 'The Bomber' Smith. An order must therefore be placed with a printing company in the weeks prior to the fight, for the vests to be returned to the club in time for the fight. White-collar boxers therefore complete a form with their full name and ring name, collated by staff at the boxing club. After one training session, I made the following note:

'A couple of the women still about. Trying to think of names. They can't believe how serious people are about it. I find this a bit awkward. It means a lot to them [the lads]' (Field notes, March 17th).

To explain further: two of the female white-collar boxers were standing at the front desk at the club after training, and were beginning to fill out the form. They were struggling to think of nicknames, and were talking in terms similar to Maude, above, regarding the triviality of the nickname requirement: white-collar boxing could be undertaken without such nicknames, they found the need to think of such nicknames tedious and unnecessary. Some of the lads were 'still about' too, likewise filling in the form. For me at least, it was an awkward situation in that these lads, who were taking this aspect of white-collar boxing seriously, were within earshot of the women having this conversation. Arguably, however, the women in this scenario were speaking 'sincerely' in Seligman *et al.*'s terms; that is, in such a way that identified ring names as, strictly-speaking, surplus-to-requirement component of white-collar boxing. These women rejected white-collar boxing as a means of performing as if they were pros, and were perhaps rather involved in white-collar boxing for the 'raw' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 71) reality of fight night as it is: a proper tear-up.

### **8.6 Anxiety in the Presence of Fight Night**

The weigh-ins were all undertaken on Friday nights, and serve as rituals through which fight night becomes the present. Fight nights, however, take place on Sunday. There is, therefore, a period of approximately 36 hours in which fight night is the locus of (subjunctive) reality, whilst not having yet occurred. During this time, the gym is the quietest it has been for the entire eight weeks previously. If any white-collars attend on the Saturday, it will only be one or two and this is not to train – the weigh-in marks out the training as 'done' (Rick, interview) – but to purchase some tickets last minute, or pay money owed to the club for tickets they have already taken. This final section serves as a reflection on this time.

Many interview participants had not yet experienced this time, having been interviewed in weeks 1-7 of the boxing course, and weigh-in being near the end of week 8. There are, however, some limited interview and ethnographic data which can be drawn upon to further understand this important time

period. Doing so allows for research question one – *what is white-collar boxing?* – to be answered in terms as thorough as possible. White-collar boxing is a process, of which this period, post-weigh-in, but pre-fight night, is a part. The ability to reflect upon my own experiences is somewhat curtailed by the ethics of this study (Chapter 4), wherein it was decided I could not participate in any physical aspects of this physical boxing culture. Here, however, a reflection can be given in hindsight pertaining to this period. It is prudent to do so, given the relative lack of data otherwise available.

I have come to think about this short period of time in musical terms, particularly in relation to electronic dance music (EDM). Common features, or 'structural elements' (Butler, 2002: 235), of many forms of EDM are what are known as the 'build up' and 'the drop'. As Solberg (2014: 67-68) notes: '[t]he build-up gives strong indications of a massive musical, but also emotional and bodily peak ahead' and is achieved 'through different instrument layers' being 'built up one after one... until the dance floor is bursting with anticipation and seemingly cannot tolerate this any longer'. Following this comes the drop, the 'most prominent and audible feature' of which is 'the reintroduction of the bass and bass drum' (Solberg, 2014: 65) through which tension is released. Training is undertaken, and can be understood as a build-up to fight night, culminating in the weigh-in. Fight night can figuratively here be understood as the drop: with its presence, the anticipation is finally over, the event takes full effect. As Solberg (2014: 72) notes, however, there is often 'a micro vacuum moment occurring just before the drop' but just after the build-up; a tiny moment of silence through which 'expectancy and tension' (Solberg, 2014: 66) are created. This vacant moment just prior to the drop, is how I came to think about this period during fieldwork.

Constructing this time as a meaningful vacuum is undoubtedly a reflection of my own experiences of fighting. Though I have never undertaken an eight-week course in white-collar boxing, I have previously fought at white-collar boxing fight nights. Not all of these fights were preceded by a weigh-in – one was an event run by a promotion other than White Collar Boxing Ltd – and one fight was taken at short notice (on the day of the fight) meaning that the weigh-in for the event had already passed. Two of the shows on which I fought were preceded by weigh-ins, however. Moreover, aside from the unusual case where I stepped in as a last-minute replacement

fighter I knew who my opponent was well before the weigh-in, meaning that, for me, there was no revelation. These differences aside, I found this short time period – being in presence of fight night, having not yet fought – highly uncomfortable. In hindsight, I found it more uncomfortable than the fighting itself.

As Maruna (2011: 14) notes, rituals generate 'emotional energy'. The time-gap between the end of training and fight night left me feeling full of such energy, but with little on which to expend it. I was therefore restless, irritable and nervous. As noted in the previous chapter, there is an unavoidable sincere reality to fight night, regardless of how the events may be presented, which entails two people – in some instances outside of this research, one of these people being me – fighting each other, the ideal result being that you knock the other person out. Oates (2006) notes that to be knocked out in boxing is to die a symbolic death, which could be understood as the ultimate stigmatisation, the ultimate loss of face (Goffman, 1952, 1963). This time between the weigh-in and fight night therefore rendered me vulnerable, anxious and feeling scared. In hindsight, this fear undoubtedly relates in my case to the damage losing may have caused to the positive, sober identity I had been able to craft through engagement in practice in the gym. Whilst the intricacies of this circumstance are individual to me, the limited data available on how the white-collars experienced this time period suggests that I was perhaps not alone in feeling this way.

Will was interviewed during this time period. This interview concerned not only this time, but approximately covered the same content as other interviews. However, given that he was due to be fighting the next day, the discussion of fight night was less abstract than many of the white-collars' responses, who were interviewed prior to their construction of fight night as present.

The show on which Will was due to be fighting was, uncharacteristically for Shadcote, in a city other than Redtown. Will's opponent had been revealed to him at this weigh-in, which was the night before this interview. He was much bigger than Will had expected. Will reflected on this:

'I'm disappointed [...] but... um, I'm in perfect physical shape going into the fight. Confident. Y'know I'm gonna have my sleep, have my preparations right, [...] we'll get over it' (Will, interview).

Immediately, this interview extract seems to indicate quite the opposite to my experience. Will articulated that he was confident, and that he did not mind fighting someone bigger than him. However, interviews are a performance, and it is the view here that Will was presenting himself in a desirable manner. The walls of Shadcote literally display instructions not to show weakness (Chapter 5), and me being a fairly central figure in the boxing club, it may have been that Will was not willing to discuss his anxieties about his forthcoming (mis)match.

Other data, however, suggest that Will did feel this way. During this interview Will was hungover, having got drunk post-weigh-in, after having his opponent revealed. Moreover, this interview was held at a pub, and he decided to stay after I left for a hair of the dog. Whilst this is speculative, Will was arguably drinking as a means of coping with the stress of his forthcoming fight, which he deemed to be a mismatch, and therefore for him, dangerous. Similar may be the case in the following scenario.

A group of white-collar lads, whilst leaving a weigh-in, were speaking in the following (perhaps braggadocious, definitely hypermasculine) terms. The slashes in this extract separate the statements made by different white-collars. They are not *verbatim* representations, though the meaning is retained in each:

'The thing is I don't feel pain anymore'/ 'I've been stabbed 9 times, bottled more times than I can count'/ 'I've been beat up by 12 blokes with bats'/ 'I've had my ear ripped off and stitched back on'/ 'I've been macheted to the head'/ 'If the guy wins I'll shake his hand because it'll be the only person ever to beat me 1-on-1 in a fight' (adapted from field notes, weigh-in 3).

Though it should be stressed that this is not common practice, Will is not the only white-collar boxer to have drunk heavily prior to the fight. On fight night itself, some white-collars, to whom the above extract pertains, arrived either hungover, drunk or otherwise intoxicated. This may have been as a means of coping with the stress of fight night. It is arguably also a means of 'cooling out' (Goffman, 1952). Should they lose their fight, they would have an excuse, a mitigating factor to be drawn upon, through which a face could be recovered should loss become a reality. In other words, rendering one's body unfit for competition through intoxication is a pre-emptive adaptation to the possibility of loss.

In more sober terms, Simon and Richard were both interviewed shortly after fight night and explicitly discussed this time period. Simon briefly mentioned 'Facebook stalking' (Simon, interview) his opponent, having found out who he was at the weigh-in and being somewhat nervous about fighting him. Chaulk and Jones (2011: 245) note that 'Facebook... has spawned its own jargon'. Facebook stalking refers to the 'profile browsing' in which people engage while using the site; "'searching" for people with whom they have an offline connection' (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007: 1144).

Whilst Facebook and other social media have not been analysed as part of this research – in hindsight to an extent regrettably – they are used to promote white collar boxing by promotional companies. White-collar boxers themselves often use social media to post material pertaining to their upcoming fights and training. From lay experience, after weigh-ins, fighters may post about their forthcoming fights and/or their opponents on Facebook and how they feel about their upcoming fight. Though no formal analysis has been undertaken, typically this entails presenting oneself as confident about the forthcoming fight. The posts may, for instance, include photographs from the weigh-in, in other words arguably publicly presenting the self in subjunctive terms as pro boxer. Facebook is, after all, called 'face' book (Goffman, 1967: 5); it allows for a public presentation of a desirable self (Zhao *et al.* 2008). Simon was perhaps thus referring to scoping out his opponent's on-line presence for such content.

Facebook also has a private messaging function, however, wherein conversations can take place behind 'closed doors' (Collins, 1980: 171), in a manner not immediately concerned with such public presentation of self. Richard noted that, after the weigh-in, his opponent contacted him via this function:

I got back [home, from the weigh-in] then he asked me to be a friend on Facebook. [...] Sent me a message on Facebook [...] saying 'looking forward to Sunday' and I said 'yeah I am as well' [...]. Then I got another message saying 'how heavy did you weigh in?' [...] so I wrote back saying '[...] couple of kilos heavier than you'. And then straight away I like, I just, in my head I thought 'I've got, I've got the edge on him in that way', just in his head, he shouldn't be asking me those questions. I would, I'd never ask those questions cos you, you're beating yourself then.



This extract, although limited to one chain of interactions between two white-collar boxers, does construct a theoretical understanding that this time period is tense for some involved. The privately felt anxieties of white-collar boxers are arguably produced by this time period, and exist beyond the individual. Given that it is a temporary lull in the eight weeks of training, and that there is something of a crescendo effect during those eight weeks in the build-up to fight night, it is perhaps unsurprising that a range of emotions are felt during this time period. It is a micro-vacuum, in which expectancy and tension are built. Whilst it was calm at the club and therefore in terms of research intensity, it was not necessarily calm for those soon to be fighting.

## **9. Fight night - From the Midlands to Las Vegas?**

*'One of my friends who did turn pro, a boxer, still is a registered boxer, pro, now [...] like, he's probably not fought in front of a crowd as big as that, y'know, he's been on TV, but most boxers, even if they are professional at like a lower level, they won't fight in front of that many people, in front of the atmosphere, y'know, the lights, the dress code, everyone's all dressed smart, just the whole atmosphere looked amazing and I wanted to be part of it, basically' (Simon, interview).*

### **9.1 Introduction**

Chapter 8 argued that the weigh-in undertaken by white-collar boxers prior to fight night is not for ascertaining weight, but is a staged reproduction of a professional boxing weigh-in, allowing white-collar boxers to experience being a world-level professional boxer. As this chapter will argue, like the weigh-in preceding it, fight night is a commodified reproduction of a world-level boxing event, and the chance to consume the experience of being a professional boxer. This chapter presents fight night as it unfolds through the various stages.

### **9.2 Methodological Prelude**

Whereas the majority of fieldwork was undertaken at Shadcote Boxing Club, fight nights are public events. A methodological prelude is necessary, as the content of Chapter 4 covers the core of daily fieldwork, and not these secondary visits. This brief section addresses the steps taken to anonymise research sites, and the ethnographic positions I adopted whilst in the field at these events. As previously discussed (Chapter 8) including the dates of fight nights in this account risks making identifiable the locations of venues. Field notes made in relation to these events are presented as follows: (field notes, event A/B/C/D). All fight night fieldwork was undertaken in the Midlands, though not always in Redtown. Two of the four fight nights were held in other cities. They were all, however, events promoted under the White-Collar Boxing Ltd banner. Shadcote staff were employed to run three

of these events. One did not involve Shadcote staff, though there were other fighters from Shadcote competing at this event, hence my attendance.

Keen to explore different positions from which to conduct ethnographic research, I attended one event as a paying customer. However, I found this position less productive in terms of data collection than the events in which I was an active participant. As discussed in Chapter 5, there are two types of ticket: seated and standing. Seated tickets are purchased in groups of ten, and being a lone researcher this option was unavailable. I therefore purchased a standing ticket. The area to which this ticket granted permission, however, was: 'Hot. Crowded. Difficult to get through' (field notes, Event D). It was far from ideal for taking field notes. Being a smoker – as I was at the time – was to an extent advantageous in this regard. My field notes from this event are littered with phrases such as 'I go for a smoke' (field notes, event D), and it was whilst smoking outside that I took most notes for this event, based on what I had observed previously. This also, however, entailed missing sections of the event.

Woodward (2007, 2008) notes that being an 'insider' can facilitate ethnographic access to a wider range of areas in the boxing world. This was certainly the case at fight night. My insider status allowed for access to be granted beyond that which a ticket-holder could easily gain: the backstage areas of fight nights made up part of my ethnographic field. Rick gave permission for this, though on the condition that I 'help out', as indeed was the overall *quid pro quo* for this research, and here helping out meant working as a cornerman, explained further in this chapter.

This provided freedom to move around venues in a manner less physically constrained than being a ticket-holder. Note-taking was easier from this position; I was not contained within one, cramped area of the venue. Equally, once the fights started, given my role as cornerman, the possibility of taking notes was diminished (though not completely halted). I carried with me a pen and a piece of paper, and took notes in between fights. These notes served as *aides-memoires*, and were then expanded upon after the event. Perhaps most importantly, however, this approach broadened the ethnographic field. Whereas observing from the crowd meant that data collection started at the point at which fighters made their entrances to the ring, and there was a physical barrier between me and the ring, being positioned as a cornerman allowed ring-side access. It also allowed

ethnographic explorations backstage. As will be discussed below, there is a great deal more to fight night than can be observed from the crowd.

Briefly, it should be noted that this chapter primarily focuses on male white-collar boxers. At fight nights, there were on average twenty fights, with only two of these being between women. One interview was conducted with a female white-collar boxer post-fight night, who could provide an account in these terms. Other female participants were interviewed prior to fight night. These participants did reflect on their anticipations of fight night in interview, these anticipations are somewhat cursory and limited. As Maude noted: 'I can't say about the fights yet, because I haven't done one yet' (Maude, interview). Nonetheless, wherever possible data pertaining to female white-collar boxers are drawn upon. This limitation is also discussed in the following chapter.

### **9.3 Professional Boxing Events**

As per the white-collar weigh-in, conducted to replicate an idealised experience of a professional boxing weigh-in, through fight night White-Collar Boxing Ltd aim to reproduce the experience of competing in a high-end professional boxing event. This will be discussed throughout this chapter, though to do so it is necessary to first examine how professional boxing events themselves have been represented. Much boxing research has focussed on the daily routines of boxers in the gym, rather than the fights themselves. Moreover, those who have analysed boxing matches themselves have tended not to focus on major-level events, as such events do not reflect much public competition. Wacquant (2004: 180- 186), for instance, discusses at some length 'Studio 104', 'a tavern and a night club' nestled between 'a junk-yard' and 'an industrial brewery' in a 'declining working-class neighbourhood' in which many professional fights take place. Wacquant (2008, 2010) is concerned with the implosion of the ghetto under neoliberalism and deindustrialisation, and its reconstruction as 'hyperghetto' (Wacquant, 2008: 114). The boxing gym, at least originally, provided a 'window' (Wacquant, 2004: 9) from which this could be observed. Undoubtedly, therefore, this does not reflect the circumstances in which all professional fights take place. It can, however, be taken as an indication that professional boxing events do not always resemble those broadcast on

television and new media (Woodward, 2014), this being a 'superficial' (Wacquant, 2004: 3) image of professional boxing.

Woodward (2004, 2007, 2014), does discuss such major-level fights. This is perhaps unsurprising, given where Woodward's ethnographic research was based, Ingle's Gym in Wincobank, Sheffield. Ingle's is one of the best professional boxing gyms in the world: Johnny Nelson (former cruiserweight world champion, now TV boxing pundit), Prince Naseem Hamed (former featherweight world champion) and Kell Brook (currently ranked by The Ring magazine as the fourth-best welterweight in the world) are amongst the 'famous' (Woodward, 2004: 13) boxers to have trained there.

For Woodward (2004: 15) professional boxing events are in various ways 'characterized by excess'; 'attended by a high-paying audience, including celebrities in other fields, who sometimes enjoy dinner whilst they watch the display' (Woodward, 2007: 108). They are 'spectacular' with 'lights, music, and... attractive young women, who are not boxers, but are part of the show' (Woodward, 2007: 112). Woodward is here referring to ring girls– scantily-clad women employed to walk around the ring between rounds holding a card informing crowds of the number of the next round. Indeed, as per other aspects of boxing, such boxing events are obviously gendered. For Woodward (2007: 119), '[t]he most visible aspects of boxing are associated with men... boxing stories are mainly about masculinity' (Woodward, 2007: 119). Professional boxing events therefore equate to celebrations of excessive, 'bodily', 'physically powerful' (Woodward, 2007: 86), 'traditional' (Woodward, 2007: 10) masculinities. As discussed in Chapter 3, these masculinities are formed at the intersections of class and race, as well as gender (Woodward, 2007, Wacquant, 2004, Atkinson, 2015).

Various locations compete for the title of being the 'Mecca' (Wacquant, 2004: 198) of professional prizefighting: Madison Square Garden in NYC (Sugden, 1996), Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas (Woodward, 2004), and more recently, Wembley and the O2, arenas in London. Las Vegas holds this title, however, which is perhaps unsurprising given the 'extravaganza' (Ritzer and Stillman, 2001: 89) that is Las Vegas, and the excessiveness of professional boxing (Woodward, 2004, 2007). The now-retired former world champion Carl Froch sought to fight there, for instance, but never did. As Froch (in Short, 2015) noted: 'Having that win on my record over in the States in the big lights of Vegas - I will own up and say maybe that's the one fight that got away'.

For the above, which should be understood in contrast to the everyday, overall humdrum of the backstreet boxing gym – much like Shadcote Boxing Club – Woodward argues professional boxing events should be understood as a Bakhtinian carnival. In brief, carnival can be understood as the temporary manifestation of the 'reverse side of the world' (Bakhtin, 1984a: 122). This has some intuitive appeal. Indeed, for the 'razzamatazz' (Woodward, 2007: 112) that professional boxing events contain, they do arguably amount to life being 'drawn out of its usual rut' (Bakhtin, 1984a: 122). Boxing events are 'excessive' (Woodward, 2007: 112) as is carnival 'grotesque' (Bakhtin, 1984b: 318). Carnival is a topsy-turvy reality, wherein the 'sacred and the profane are drawn into the same dance' (Bakhtin, 1984b: 160). Defecation, for instance, ceases to be profane (Muir, 2005), and this can be extended to all other bodily secretions – indeed in carnival they arguably cease to be secretions, for they no longer belong to the 'inner body' (Horváth, 2014: 1) and are therefore no longer *secret*. Likewise, in boxing the spillage of blood is applauded (Oates, 2006). Woodward (2007: 111) therefore argues that '[t]he carnivalesque is apparent in boxing through its negotiation of fear and disgust'.

Beyond these superficial similarities, however, to characterise professional boxing as carnivalesque amounts to a 'grotesque' (Bakhtin, 1984a: 103) misunderstanding. For Bakhtin (1984a: 123) in carnival:

'what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people'.

Sugden (1996: 195) notes that 'boxing is the cultural product of a global political economy which determines considerable social inequalities'. Similar has been noted by many sociologists of boxing (e.g. Woodward, 2014; Wacquant, 2004; Trimbur, 2013). Indeed, Woodward's own theorisation of boxing can be used to further demonstrate that carnival is an inadequate theory through which to characterise professional boxing.

As Woodward notes: boxing 'is a sport where traditional social divisions persist and inequalities remain' (Woodward, 2014: 151); '[t]ime is spent [by professional boxers] developing strategies for countering the racism of spectators in competitions' (Woodward, 2004: 11); '[w]hilst those brave and strong enough to fight in the ring have the physical strength to overpower

any of the individual spectators, the spectators are positioned as controlling the subordinated performer' (Woodward, 2007: 156). For Bakhtin, however, carnival, at its core contains 'complete liberation from seriousness, the atmosphere of equality, freedom, and familiarity' (Bakhtin, 1984b: 254). In other words, in carnival there are no subordinates, there is no inequality, there is no racism, there are no managers.

What can be retained, however, from Woodward's scholarship is that such events are characterised by 'razzamatazz' (Woodward, 2007: 112). Indeed, what may even be retained is that professional boxing events entail an alternate construction of time and feeling, life *is* 'drawn out of its usual rut' (Bakhtin, 1984a: 112), it is just that it is not drawn into Bakhtinian carnival mode. The social reality of such professional boxing events is excessive, standing in contrast to the mundane.

Henceforth, this chapter will argue that white-collar boxing fight nights are a commodified reproduction of the excessive, extraordinary events held for professional fighters at the top of the pro game. Through continued ritual action and theatrical props, the illusion that white-collar boxers are professional boxers is produced, and it is largely this experience that white-collar boxers consume:

Robert: 'It's like the real thing innit really? Um, it's not like a school playground fight where everyone's just screaming and shouting, it's organised, and there's lights flashing and there's music, people chanting, and it's good. You got your own kit on as well, your own colours, um and I think you get to wear the White-Collar Boxing Ltd get up and go, the gloves and stuff, so, not too sure, but, yeah. It's gonna be good. It's gonna be *explosive*. I think [...] this is a one-time thing for me, like I said, so I'm gonna go out with a bang' (Robert, interview).

White-collar fight nights are a 'such a precise operation' (field notes, event C) and follow a particular temporal form. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, reproduces the temporal sequence of fight night, and through doing so reconstructs fight night in the terms expressed above.

#### 9.4 Arriving at the Venue

Though referred to as fight night, the opening bell (round one, fight one) is rung in the afternoon, around 5pm. The venue doors open for the audience at 4pm, fighters at 3pm and Shadcote staff at 2pm. In other words, fight night, whilst finishing at night (between 10pm and 1am, depending on the number of fights) begins in the day. For the three events attended during fieldwork in which I was there in as both researcher and Shadcote staff I attended from 2pm onwards. Whereas for the other event, I attended from 4pm onwards.

Though four events were attended as part of this field work, two of these events were held at the same venue (*i.e.* four events, but three venues). Two of the venues were conference facilities within comparable, prestigious sports stadia in the Midlands. This field note refers to my arrival at one such venue:

'We [I and three other Shadcote lads] go into the venue. It is massive! 3 rings, all next to each other. Strobe lights, spot lights. 3500 capacity. About 30 tables. No time to soak in the grandeur too much, however, we have to meet with the [Shadcote] team' (adapted from field notes, Event C).

The other venue was similar to that described above. In being professional sports facilities – they were both stadia in which top-level ball sports teams play – the backdrop to the idealised professional experience is achieved. Indeed, one of these venues literally overlooks another venue in which local professional boxing events are held. It is physically bigger than this other venue, but towers above it in terms of the prestige with which it is afforded. The white-collar fight night venue is nationally, and arguably internationally, famous, whereas the pro venue is not.

The third venue, wherein two fight nights were attended during this study, was not quite as grand as the other two. Rick had greater control over booking the venue for these events, and, as noted at various stages of this thesis, he rejects the 'drama' (Rick, interview) of white-collar boxing, preferring to focus on the fighting itself. Arguably the other two events held in sports stadia were more in keeping with the ideal operation of a White-Collar Boxing Ltd fight night. Nonetheless, the conference facility booked by Rick was in a relatively 'up-market' venue. Indeed, this third venue is down the road from a leisure centre where the local pros fight, and Rick would



never consider this leisure centre as a potential location for fight night. White-collar boxing is, after all, an activity in which participants consume the experience of being a professional boxer *in idealised terms* – that of being a champion – and not just any nameless, local pro.

Though three of these events had one boxing ring, as one might expect, at one event there were multiple rings, side by side. There were over a hundred fighters at this event, and multiple boxing matches took place at a time. At all events, there were barriers separating the standing crowd from those with ringside tickets at tables. Depending on the venue these features differed, though the following featured in the construction of these events: an elevated walkway leading from the stage curtain through an illuminated archway, along which the fighters were due to make their entrances to the ring, flashing disco lights, strobe lights and lasers, smoke machines, pyrotechnics.

The Shadcote staff arrive first, then white-collars, not all together, but one by one or in small groups of two or three. As a reminder, the majority of white collar boxers are men, and come fight night, there are typically only two matches to be held between women, meaning that this arrival entails 36 men and 4 women. As is the dress code for the event for the crowd, some of the lads arrive in suits, though all arrive with their kit bags over their shoulder. In this way, 'they look like pro footballers arriving before a game' (field notes, event A). The Shadcote staff gather in the entrance, greeting them, shaking their hands, 'making them feel special' (field notes, Event B). Immediately after this, however, the same staff usher the white-collars backstage.

## **9.5 Backstage**

As per most boxing events, during the event there is a backstage area where fighters wait for their turn in the ring, get changed, warm up for competition and leave their belongings. Participating in this research as an 'insider' on three fight night fieldwork visits, I had access to these areas. Prior to the doors opening to the public, the white-collars gather in these areas. At one of the venues, this comprised multiple rooms on the floor above the main conference facility: a large meeting room with a big, wall-mounted television which served as the main base for the day, and four smaller meeting rooms, which served as warm-up rooms. The backstage area for the other fight

night attended in this capacity was a room, approximately equal in size to the room in which the fighting was taking place, which served all the functions of five rooms backstage at the other venue.

The notion of 'backstage' perhaps indicates that Goffman's (1990) social theory is of importance to the analysis of fight night. Indeed, it is, though some qualifications are required. Whilst backstage, these rooms are not *per se* private. Typically, forty white-collar boxers are gathered backstage, and in the case of one show this figure was substantially higher. Whilst inaccessible to the crowd, this space was not private. In contrast, the most private space in social life is perhaps the toilet (Molotch, 2010). I did not deem it ethical to conduct research in toilets, but it may be that fighters secluded themselves in toilet cubicles as a means of gaining some privacy within and from the backstage area (fieldnotes, Event B). Similarly, some white-collar boxers took themselves off for time alone, for instance for a cigarette which could similarly be understood as forging moments of privacy backstage. Data are not available on these times, but they serve to indicate that backstage is not *per se* private, or comfortably backstage in Goffman's terms.

The first task for the staff of Shadcote Boxing Club is actively gathering fighters in the room, initially to take headcounts to establish that everyone is present and no one has 'bottled it' (*i.e.* not showed up). This did not happen during fieldwork, but had previously, which poses problems in that a fighter is rendered opponentless, who has, through ticket sales, paid for the experience of having a boxing match. One way or another, a last-minute opponent is therefore always found.

Once all are gathered, white-collars are given talks by the referee and a White-Collar Boxing Ltd representative. The referees at these events were ex-BBBofC referees and/or ex-professional boxers, who found white-collar boxing events to be more numerous and less bureaucratic than professional boxing events, and a better source of income than refereeing professional boxing. That these referees were involved in the professional fight game is highlighted to white-collars. The referees also scored and judged the matches (unlike the majority of boxing, where there is a panel of judges), which is explained to the white-collars.

The referee's talk details to those fighting the rules of boxing. The general advice given by the referee is: to protect yourself at all times or the fight

will be stopped; that work-rate alone will not be sufficient to win *i.e.* 'windmilling' (a term used to describe the action of indiscriminately swinging punches – swinging arms around like a windmill) will not be looked on favourably; that they want to see skilful boxing with clean punches; and, most importantly, that the referee's command must be obeyed at all times. This talk is repeated to white-collar boxers whilst in the ring immediately before the start of the fight. Much of this talk resembles the talk given to professional boxers (*cf.* Klitschko v Fury, 2017: 2 minutes, 3 seconds; though any televised fight is likely to broadcast this talk) but the reason the talk is given to white-collars differs: it is providing the professional experience, and also provides instructions for how to look professional. In this respect, there are differences: whereas professional boxers are informed by the referee to conduct 'a good, clean fight' white-collars are told not to windmill, the point being, having trained rigorously for years to reach this point, professionals competing on the world stage do not need to be told this.

The talks given to white-collar boxers by a staff member of White-Collar Boxing Ltd are less technically orientated than the ref talk, but are rather mostly 'congratulatory' (fieldnotes, Event A). The following note, taken at event B, exemplifies the nature of this talk. It is incomplete, *non-verbatim*, but does approximately represent the talk given that day by one of the staff of White-Collar Boxing Ltd. Similar talks were given at every event attended during field research:

'You are world champions for the day. Pros don't box in venues this nice. British title fights take place in leisure centres. This is your time in the spotlight. Most of you will only do this once' (field notes, Event B).

These talks frame the event in such a way that they can be understood as better than a professional title fight taking place at the domestic level. The event is insincerely constructed as being a world champion professional title fight: you are world champions. Understood in ritual terms, however, these talks serve to maintain the subjunctive. In this respect, the above talk relayed above can be read in the following way: it is *as if* you are world champions for the day.

## 9.6 The Crowd

*'The muffled, repetitive thud of the bass begins to reverberate through the floors of the [upstairs] backstage area. This means that the DJ has switched on the music, which signals that the crowd are arriving' (field notes, event A).*

The crowd arrive approximately one hour before the first fight. Attendance differed between events; the lowest attendance was approximately 800 and the highest was over 3000. This is far higher than has previously been reported (Trimbur, 2013). This perhaps reflects the differing business models between the Shadcote and the Gleason's context. White-collar boxers are required to sell tickets to their fight to participate in the programme, which ensures a well-attended event whilst covering the cost of training. As per Trimbur's (2013) context, however, this means that crowds at white-collar boxing events are mostly attended by 'friends, family, and other white-collar athletes' (Trimbur, 2013: 124). Trimbur's implication is that crowds at white-collar fights are not boxing fans, and this is the implication here too. It should perhaps be added that it is possible that audience members are boxing fans, though if they are, this is coincidental. Tickets to local professional fights are roughly equivalent in price to white-collar fights, and if you wanted to attend a night of quality boxing for £20-30 you would not opt for the white-collar boxing fight night over the professional event. As discussed later in this chapter, white-collar boxing matches are often more like pub fights than boxing matches. Where this research context differs to Trimbur's context, however, is that the crowd serve the purpose of appearing to be boxing fans.

White-collar boxers occupy three positions simultaneously: producer, product and consumer (Chapter 5). It is this final position that is unusual about white-collar boxing: whilst in pro boxing the boxer is producer and product (Sugden, 1996), the crowd are consumers. White-collar boxing is, however, a tourist excursion in the experience economy, wherein the commodified experience is that of the idealised career of a professional boxer, consumed in just eight weeks. The white-collar boxer occupies these positions, though additionally they are consumers of the experience (*i.e.* object, product) which they produce, their bodily performance. In this capacity, white-collar boxers consume the crowd, who are there to sustain the performance, rather than to consume the boxing itself.

The ticket to one of the events attended during this research was designed to look like a boarding pass for an airline flight. The door opening time and first fight time were respectively designated 'boarding time' and 'take-off time'; and the ticket number was designated as 'seat number'. The venue was noted accurately, but beneath this was another section pertaining to 'departure' and 'arrival' information. This ticket assured access '**From: The Midlands. To: Las Vegas**'. Las Vegas being the boxing capital of the world, this ticket suggests that White-Collar Boxing Ltd intend to reproduce an idealised experience of being a pro. This is also reflected in the dress code by which the crowd must abide. Indeed, purchasing a ticket, whilst a necessary component of being permitted to enter, is in itself insufficient. Stated on the tickets for all events attended during this fieldwork was the following:

'Black tie event. No jeans, trainers or check shirts. DRESS CODE  
WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED – NO EFFORT, NO ENTRY'.

This dress code is not quite as strictly enforced as the ticket information declares. People very rarely dress according to formal black-tie rules (*i.e.* tuxedos and ball gowns). In practice, the 'minimum' standard of dress is shirt, tie, smart shoes and trousers for men. Women tend to wear cocktail dresses, but some also wear maxi dresses, a pencil skirt with a smart top, or other similarly smart attire. The latter section of the ticket information perhaps thus better describes the dress code for the events: 'NO EFFORT, NO ENTRY'. Indeed, occasionally, ticket-holders were turned away by security for arriving in jeans and smart-casual shirts and told to come back wearing suits (field notes, Event A, Event C), as noted in my field diary: 'They were annoyed by this, and after a bit of arguing with the doormen - 'as if you have to wear a suit to a boxing match?!' – left. I am not sure if they came back' (adapted from field notes, Event A).

Robert: Well, you see a lot of fights on telly, they get dressed up to go, it's an event, it's a special occasion, so, that's why people are comin' nice and smart, and dressed the way they're supposed to be dressed. They're not comin' in tracksuits and hoodies and caps like what you'd probably find at some unlicensed events.

The dress code for fight night should be considered in relation to white-collar boxing elsewhere (*i.e.* Trimbur, 2013). A full description of audience attire is lacking, though 'crocheted hats' (Trimbur, 2013: 117) and 'guayabera

shirts and fedoras' (118) include some of the garments the audience wear to white-collar events in the NYC context. If you attempted to wear any of these items to a white-collar boxing event run by Shadcote, you would not make it through the doors. Whereas white-collar boxing in NYC is initiated for upper-middle-class men to consume working-class masculinity, this is not the case in the Shadcote context. Rather, white-collar boxing aims to reproduce the idealised experience of the pro career, shorn of much of the patience required to do so in sincere terms, with the end point being fight night; the commodified reproduction of a world-title fight, in which, through participation, white-collar boxers can act as if they are pros. The smart attire required by White-Collar Boxing Ltd is obviously not illusory itself, though in this way, the meaning of the demand for this dress code can be understood as a sustenance of this subjunctive reality.

Though this differed between events, essentially along the lines of the venues booked by Rick, fight nights were characterised by excess. Overhead lighting was dimmed, the ring was illuminated by spotlights and the room was lit with disco lights flashing to the beat of popular music, which was played at high volumes between the fights. At arguably the grandest of these events I made the following notes, which relay some of the components of fight night that together made for an excessive display: 'smoke machine. Strobe lights, spot lights. Music. Ring girls performing with fire. An elevated walkway [for the fighters' ring entrances]' (field notes, Event C). In much the same way that you could be forgiven for presuming that you were attending a professional boxing weigh-in through being at a white-collar weigh-in, as the latter purposefully simulates the former, were you to wander into a white-collar fight night you could be forgiven for thinking that you were at professional boxing event. Like the weigh-in, fight night constitutes a staged reproduction through which the experience of being a top-ranking professional boxer can be consumed.

### **9.7 Warming Up**

As part of the introductory talks discussed previously, white-collars are told the following by a member of staff:

'Four fights before your fight you need to be backstage, hands wrapped, boots on, ready to warm up. Your corner team will then take you to warm up. During the first round of the fight prior to

yours, you will be taken to a holding area behind the entrance to the ring. From there, it's showtime' (adapted from field notes, Event A).

This short section of the talk, though *non-verbatim* and abridged, relays the activities that constitute warming up for fight night, all of which occurs backstage: cladding up in fight wear, and the physical aspect of the warm-up, which entails doing rounds of padwork. These will now be addressed in turn.

### **9.7.1 Getting Dressed for Action**

If the crowd are demanded to make an 'effort' to be granted entry to fight night in terms of the clothes they wear, and this is consumed by white-collar boxers as part of the professional boxing experience, then the clothing of the white-collars themselves also deserves attention. For Wacquant (2004: 53), the clothing that boxers wear provides 'a good clue as to the degree of involvement in the sport, although this is easier to manipulate and therefore less reliable'. Things are not what they seem in white-collar boxing, and whilst by this point in the thesis, this is a well-rehearsed notion, it is worth here drawing upon again. Putting on the fight kit can be understood as a ritual through which one can insincerely become a pro. This section focuses on three items worn by white-collar boxers at fight night as a means of demonstrating this: boxing boots, boxing shorts, and handwraps. There is no difference between the clothing worn by male and female white-collars, although it should be noted that the female boxers got changed in a separate room to the men, to which I did not have access.

In professional boxing, boots are often worn primarily as a means of supporting the ankle. As discussed in Chapter 5, punching power is generated through the legs upwards and this involves twisting on the feet, leaving the ankle susceptible to injury. The soles of boxing boots are also developed specifically to have less grip than, for instance, running shoes. It should be noted that whilst most amateur and professional boxers wear boxing boots, they are not however mandatory. As noted in the AIBA Rules, for instance: '[b]oxers must box in light boots or shoes' (AIBA Open Boxing Competition Rules, 2017: 20, emphasis added). In the pro game, David Haye – former two-weight professional world champion – famously chose to wear trainers in his contest against Derek Chisora (*cf.* Daily Mail, 2012).

Shadcote staff are, however, insistent that white-collar boxers wear boxing boots for matches, as to maintain the professional image of the event.

Robinson (2015) notes that footwear is a mundane aspect of social life that can go unnoticed as sociologically significant, but there is 'a relationship between shoes and identity' (Robinson, 2015: 906). Indeed, here, whilst boxing boots serve the purpose of facilitating movement around the ring, they also serve as props through which the performance of the identity of professional boxer can be achieved. The boots, for the most part belong to the white-collar boxers, though through putting these boots on – and being a short-term contained experience, for the majority it may be the only time they put these boots on – white-collar boxers are able to sustain and consume the performance of being someone else, being a pro.

In a similar capacity to that discussed in Chapter 9 on Facebook 'stalking', in interview Al described how he had spent time viewing online material in relation to white-collar boxing events other than those run by Shadcote and White-Collar Boxing Ltd. He was unimpressed by the photographs of the fight nights he saw, principally because rather than wearing the shorts that professionals wear, the white-collars could wear tracksuit bottoms:

'I went on to their event [Facebook page] and they was all in tracksuit bottoms and stuff and I was like 'you fucking tramps, what you doin?' It didn't look professional, it didn't look good' (Al, interview).

Wearing boxing shorts, in other words, allows one to construct the look of professionalism. To this extent, some white-collar boxers buy their own custom-made shorts from the same suppliers as the pros. Multiple pairs of boxing shorts (half red, half blue) have been purchased by Shadcote to match the colours of the corners out of which they will be fighting. Given that these shorts constitute part of the costume worn by white-collars as they enter the ring, this aspect of white-collar boxing will be discussed further in the ring walk section of this chapter.

Putting on the costume should not, however, be understood straightforwardly as subjects wearing objects. Rather, one must know how to put them on, to use and to wear them effectively. This is well demonstrated through analysis of wrapping of hands. To decrease the damage done to the hands and wrists through punching, boxers wear handwraps, otherwise known as wraps or bandages. These wraps vary in



length, though are approximately two metres long. There are different patterns that can be followed to wrap your hands, and these require learning and practice. For those new to the sport, they can be tricky to apply. Even if one has memorised in principle a pattern to be followed, being able to follow it is another matter. Just as the newcomer to the world of marijuana-use 'knows that others use it to "get high," but 'does not know what this means in concrete terms' (Becker, 1953: 236) white-collar boxers know that handwraps are used by the pros, but do not necessarily know how to use handwraps as a means of protecting flesh and bone. As Wacquant (2004: 127-128) notes, wrapping hands is part of the 'corporeal thrift acquired gradually' as a means of 'preserving bodily capital'.

There is knowing how tightly to wrap them, for instance: too loose and they begin to unravel off the hand, but too tight and they limit dexterity and may exacerbate damage to knuckles. Through being present within the boxing world for but eight weeks, some white-collar boxers do not know how to do this by fight night. Not only have they not developed a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 66) in terms of fighting proficiency, some white-collars had not developed the feel for the cloth of the game, in an immediately material sense. In some cases, a Shadcote member of staff would wrap their hands for them, though in others the white-collars would wrap them as best they could by themselves, even if the final product is faulty. Having to ask admits lack of knowledge, whilst the event in which they are participating is a sustained illusion of mastery. That is, asking for help would risk a reversion to the world of sincerity.

Notably, it tended to be women that asked for assistance with hand wrapping (field notes: Event A, Event C). This is not to say that female white-collar boxers were any better or worse than male white-collar boxers at wrapping their hands. It is rather to say that the female white-collar boxers were less concerned with sustaining the appearance of proficiency despite its lack (*i.e.* the subjunctive). As per the weigh-in, this can be taken as a suggestion that female white-collar boxers participate in fight night in sincere terms (Seligman *et al.* 2008). Overall, whether assistance is requested or not, that people who do not know how to wrap their hands will shortly be boxing in front of thousands of people in venues nicer than most professionals is telling of the disparity between appearance and reality in white-collar boxing.

### **9.7.2 Hitting the Pads**

Once white-collars are in their fight gear, they are collected by their corner team and taken to warm up. These warm-ups last approximately 30 minutes, though they are not exercising for the duration. The warm-ups consist of rounds of pad-work, lasting approximately two minutes each, with breaks of a minute or two between them. All of this is, however, on the presumption that the preceding fights 'go the distance', that is, not stopped prior to the final bell. For instance, should there be a first-round knockout in one of the fights before theirs, ten minutes might be shaved off the anticipated warm-up time.

As well as administering a warm-up via padwork, the staff might impart some final words of 'wisdom' to be put to use, if possible, during the fight. Typically, these are reminders to fighters to keep their guard up continually, and to not turn away in the face of incoming punches. If there is a noticeable height difference between the fighters, for instance, and the shorter boxer was being warmed up, they might be told to try to 'get inside', meaning that they should aim to set the terms for the fight at a range closer than the outstretched jab of their opponent, the risk being that their opponent keeps them out of range by continually jabbing. Having been training for only eight weeks, however, these words, whilst taken on board, cannot necessarily be put into action: as discussed in Chapter 8, sparring is mostly undertaken to get used to being hit and hitting others, rather than fine-tuning fighters in the art of pugilism.

All those who make up the corner teams at Shadcote have some form of fight history, though this fight history differs from staff member to staff member. Some are ex-professional boxers, whereas some have previously had one white-collar fight. For instance, once the team had dispersed from the meeting discussed earlier in this chapter the more experienced members of the staff crew: 'instantly talk about how some of the staff hired today are 'less than experienced'' (field notes, Event C).

In this regard, as per the clothing that the crowd and the fighters wear that contribute to the sustenance of an insincere construction of a professional boxing event, so too does the clothing worn by staff. The Shadcote Boxing Club t-shirt that the staff team are required to wear is a form of 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1986: 56): wearing it qualifies one to impart pugilistic knowledge, regardless of whether beneath it is a body bestowed with it in

corporeal terms. All staff members present, however, 'as if' (Seligman *et al.*, 2008: 65) they have experience sufficient to corner fights.

Equally, most of the Shadcote staff know how to operate a pair of pads with enough proficiency to administer a warm-up. It is normally the most experienced corner member that conducts the pad-work element of the warm-up. Pad-work, in a similar capacity to sparring, is however an interaction that requires both actors understand what is happening. The pad-work, whilst being successful in terms of the fighters getting a sweat on, does not always go to plan in other ways. Though for the most part it does, the following field note represents a scenario that could be understood as a warm-up gone wrong, for lack of pugilistic knowledge:

'Harry is warming up a white-collar on the pads. As a reminder to keep his hands up, Harry taps him on the side of the head with the pad. The white-collar responds by punching Harry in the face. I interjected: 'You know you're not supposed to be hitting him, don't you? The white-collar replies: 'I thought that's what we're doing?' Harry says: 'No, that's *not* what we're doing' WC: 'But I'm fighting in a minute?' Harry replies: 'Yes. But you're just *warming-up* at the moment!' (field notes, Event B).

The white-collar in this scenario did not understand that during the warm-up for fight night, pad-work involves hitting the pads, and nothing else. In the previous weeks he will have hit the pads in training. During this training, he will not have punched his pad holders in the face, at least intentionally. Training is now over, however, and his renewed (mis)understanding of padwork, it would seem, is that because he is due to be fighting shortly, and that in this fight he is due to be punching his opponent in the face, that the warm-up should include punching someone in the face. Internal to itself this is logical, or perhaps becomes understandable when expressed in this way. Padwork, during the warm-up for fight night, however, remains padwork as it is conducted in training. This did not occur with every white-collar boxer in the warm-up, far from it, though it does suggest, in a similar capacity to the above of hand wrapping, that in white-collar boxing there is a disparity between pugilistic habitus, and performative display of pugilistic habitus. In white-collar boxing, the rookie presents as if they are Rocky, but remains a rookie.

## 9.8 Ring Walk

'Are you ready?' Dave nods, and with a serious face on looks up at me: 'Ready as I'll ever be'. We're standing behind the curtain, just about to walk out in front of a thousand people. The music drops in volume, and the voice of the MC takes over the PA: 'And now, ladies and gentlemen, for the next fight. Put your hands together and make some noise... boxing out of the red corner: Dave 'the Warrior' Wilson!' The crowd make the noise demanded of them, and, following a ring girl, the Warrior, Harry and I step through the curtain. We make our way towards the spot-lit ring, lit up by the lasers, doused in the sound of the crowd, and the epic orchestral sounds of Redman's *Smash Sumthin'*. I find Dave's choice of music interesting: 'I've been born again... hit the switch, Igor: he's alive!' (adapted from field notes, Event A).

This fieldnote can be distilled to identify the sequence that the ring walk follows: arrival behind the curtain, announcement of boxer via ring name, the playing of ring music, entry to ring following ring girl. This process is then repeated for the opposing boxer. Analysing this sequence of events further allows for the better understanding of what white-collar boxing is, how social divisions inform practice in the sport, and how, in this distinctly late-modern practice, identity is formed.

Whilst the field note above might seem to suggest that this is the case, in hindsight, the gothic double that Redman invokes is not an entirely appropriate way in which to understand the ring walk. It is not a hidden self that is revealed through the ring walk, nor does the ring walk entail rebirth as monster. Nonetheless, the above is salient to the extent that the ring walk is a performance of a self that does not reflect that of the 'everyday' (Seligman *et al.* 2008). The curtain can be understood as a threshold, and upon its crossing, white-collar boxers enter onto a stage on which they act *as if* they are someone else. They do not 'literally' (Wacquant, 1995a: 501), however, become someone else.

It is for this reason that Goffman's theory of performativity is not wholly applicable to this context. For Goffman, whilst the self is socially formed and sustained through performance, it does not entail that one can immediately step into a different frame or onto a different stage and in doing so becoming endowed with the capacities to adequately perform. Were this the case, we

would all be performing in the West End or Hollywood. For Goffman performance must be learnt (Schoenmakers, 1990). In fact, when Goffman constructed the dramaturgic model of everyday life, he did not mean that we are all actors in this way. In the preface to *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman reflects on the 'obvious inadequacies' (Goffman, 1963: preface) of his theory, noting that one of the 'more important' of these is that:

'on the stage one player presents himself in the guise of a character to characters projected by other players; the audience constitutes a third party to the interaction — one that is essential and yet, if the stage performance were real, one that would not be there. In real life, the three parties are compressed into two; the part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience'.

Here, importantly, Goffman makes a distinction between that taking place on the theatre stage and 'real life'. Goffman did not intend for his model to be applicable to the analysis of walking onto a stage in the terms required for the analysis of white-collar boxing (or any aspect of social life with a physical area demarcated 'stage'). Stage and screen actors consciously perform in the role of someone else, whereas sociological theories of performance tend to focus on unwitting, or embodied, that is mundane, performance that constructs a stable self, much of which is done without the need for conscious thought (Schoenmakers, 2014). Were such action unavailable to us, there could arguably be no society, in that we would all be constantly hung up on what to do next and how to do it.

It is precisely this that white-collar boxing risks. White-collar boxers have never been in a boxing match before, and have the bare minimum pugilistic competence. However, they must perform as if they are capable in these terms to maintain the subjunctive reality they wish to consume. In Chapter 8 it was discussed that cues are provided by Shadcote and White-Collar Boxing Ltd staff to inform action for lack of know-how. In so doing, the ritual enactment of the subjunctive remains possible. Similar could be said about the ring walk.

### 9.8.1 Ring Girls

On arrival at the curtain, a Shadcote staff member will relay to the white-collar boxers the short, simple message that ensures successful entry to the ring: 'just follow the ring girl to the ring, she'll show you where to go' (field notes, Event A). Between the curtain and the ring is not a great distance. Though this differed between events, it is approximately 20 metres. Quantitative distance, however, is not the best means through which to discuss the ring walk. As discussed below, the ring walk is an intense time period, and one white-collar has not taken before. By following the ring girl, potential errors in transit to the ring are avoided. Similarly, whilst the white-collar boxer follows the ring girl, the Shadcote staff follow the white-collar boxer, serving a similar purpose: the white-collar boxer is sandwiched between two people who know what they are doing. In this way, the white-collar boxer, whilst lacking the knowledge required for professional conduct, is guided into the ring, whilst being able to look professional.

Though it can be stated that ring girls do not serve this purpose in professional boxing, a sociology of ring girls in any form of boxing is overall lacking. As noted earlier in this chapter, for Woodward (2007) ring girls are 'part of the show' though this is not expanded upon. Wacquant (2004: 184) controversially notes that the ring girls are 'enticing to the point of whoreishness [*sic*]'. It may be, however, that it is in this controversial manner that ring girls are conceptualised by the white-collar lads. To this extent, on receipt of the instruction to follow the ring girl, various white-collars noted words to the effect of:

'I'd like to do more than follow her' (field notes, event A).

On hearing phrases such as this:

'The ring girl just smiled. I felt bad. He spoke about her like she wasn't there, or able to hear. Plenty of comments made all night by staff and boxers about the 'talent on display' here'. (field notes, event A)

In other words, ring girls in white-collar boxing are constructed by the men involved as objects of sexual desire:

'A fairy-tale proposition: the heavyweight champion of the world is the most dangerous man on earth: the most feared, the most manly. His proper mate is very likely the fairy-tale princess whom

the mirrors declare the fairest woman on earth' (Oates, 2006: 70).

Though this may not be what Oates meant by the term 'fairest', it is worth focussing upon: all ring girls in shows attended during this study were white. That only white ring girls were hired may be situated within a racialised hierarchy of beauty, drawing upon and reproducing whiteness as the 'normative yardstick' (Hill Collins, 2004: 193). As Deliovsky (2008: 56) notes: 'non-Anglo-Saxon white women' are 'exoticized/eroticized' but 'within their respective ethnic frame. They are not viewed as beauties in their own right but as "ethnic" beauties'. White-collar boxing, however, is white men consuming white, male dominance, within a whitewashed frame. By being led into the ring by a white woman constructed as sexual object, the feeling of domination can be consumed.

This study, regrettably, does not have interview data with ring girls. The way the events are constructed means that ring girls appear with the beginning of the show, and disappear with its end. This is a drawback of this study. Whether this dynamic can be wholly understood in this way depends on the ways the ring girls experience such interactions: the reason why the ring girl in the extract above smiled after a white-collar lad inferred that he wanted to have sex with her may be a good starting point for such an analysis. I experienced her smile as showing awkwardness and discomfort, though it may have meant something else: for instance, she may have been smiling as a means of hiding her laughter at the idea that he thought he would ever have a chance.

As per professional boxing contexts, ring girls are constructed as sexual objects of male desire. However, given that essentially white-collar boxing entails the commodification of professional boxing as an institution, reproduced for mass consumption, it can be added that ring girls in white-collar boxing could be understood as doubly commodified. The gender order of professional boxing is reproduced as a means of consuming the experience of a pro. As per the suited and booted crowd, who are present to sustain the consumption experience of an idealised, high-end professional boxing event, so are the ring girls. Understood in the above ways – as guide and as prop – ring girls are 'part of the show' (Woodward, 2007: 112) in white-collar boxing, though in ways additional to those identified by Woodward in the context of professional boxing.

Beyond this, however, unlike Woodward's earlier discussed comment (that women are part of boxing shows, but not as boxers) women are not only present at white-collar boxing events as ring girls. There were at each of the events attended during this research boxing matches between women. As a reminder, this also differs from the NYC context, wherein white-collar boxers are exclusively men (Trimbur, 2013).

'[Backstage] the female white-collar boxers discuss the 'pretty ring girls with the false eyelashes and all the rest'. And 'I'm here 'like this' in boxing gear'. (field notes, event A).

The male white-collar boxers effectively constructed ring girls as 'ornament' (Seligman et al. 2008: 148) – objectified for the purpose of sustaining the subjunctive reality of being a pro through performance. The above fieldnote suggests, however, that the ring girls are not experienced in this capacity by female white-collar boxers.

### **9.8.2 Ring Names**

The function of ring names has been discussed in Chapter 8, wherein they were noted as props through which one can consume an ideal self as pro boxer, through performance 'as if' one is a pro boxer. Once again, at fight night, when white-collar boxers enter the ring, they do so on these terms: Nev Collins does not enter the ring, but Nev *the Cannon* Collins. Unlike the weigh-in, however, white-collars are presented with a vest on which their ring name, alongside their real name, is obviously displayed. This vest is worn during the ring walk, and then the fight. Some white-collars also buy custom-made boxing shorts from suppliers who make ring attire for pros. Like the professionals, these shorts are emblazoned with their ring name across the thick waistband that boxing shorts usually have. Beyond this, the shorts contain other features of identification. For instance, one white-collar's shorts had 'Union Jack panels cut in them' (field notes, Event A). These shorts therefore provide visual indication that 'National identity matters' (field notes, Event A) in white-collar boxing.

Indeed, national identity is also presented through ring names. This was particularly the case for the minority of Eastern European white-collar boxers. As per every discussion of ring names in this thesis, debating them risks breaching anonymity. Therefore, an example from outside of this



research context will be used to discuss this. Mirko Filipović is a well-known professional kickboxer and MMA fighter. He is Croatian, and prior to becoming a professional fighter he was a police officer. His ring name is therefore Cro Cop, short for Croatian Copper. Ring names of Eastern European white-collar boxers drew upon nationality in a similar capacity to that of Filipović. These names might also draw upon the fighting terminology discussed in Chapter 8 in combination with signifiers of nation. For instance, were Greg Vesik a white-collar boxer from Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, he might call himself Greg 'The Tallinn Tank' Vesik.

Notably, the ring names of Eastern European fighters were sometimes announced by the MC incorrectly, deliberately so. Taking Filipović as an example again, were he fighting on a white-collar event, he may have been announced as 'Crap Cop'. There seemed to be no pattern to this – some of the Eastern Europeans were announced correctly as per their wishes, whereas others were not. Data is overall lacking on this phenomenon, though it is worth noting, given the racialisation of Eastern Europeans discussed in Chapter 7 on sparring. Indeed, this practice arguably stems from sparring, wherein the Eastern European lads posed a threat to the construction of the white-collar lads as white and dominant. This misnaming compromises the possibility of performing 'as if' pro, in that it renders the required props, at minimum faulty and at maximum an active hindrance, prior to the competition itself. This practice could be understood as ritual blemishing (Goffman, 1963) of identity underpinned by a hot, white nationalism; that is an attempt to de- 'face' (Goffman, 1967: 5) these lads for the risk they pose to the white, English man becoming Rocky. This practice could be understood in a similar capacity to the graffiti with which Polish community centres were defaced in the run-up to and aftermath of the 'Brexit' referendum vote (e.g. BBC, 2016): as a sign of being unwelcome. The white, English lads' names, of course, were not subject to such amendments.

### **9.8.3 Ring Music**

Ring music is the song that plays through the sound system whilst a fighter makes their entrance to the ring. White-collars select their own ring music, bringing with them a CD, which, prior to doors opening they submit to the DJ. I made efforts to note the songs to which fighters made their entrances,

for instance: 'Rhythm is a dancer!' (Event, D). In hindsight, whilst not a complete failure these notes are of limited use: music can be used and interpreted in different ways (Bull and Back, 2016). Without asking why these songs were chosen, beyond perhaps injecting the sonic into this sketch, notes such as the above alone are limited in terms of being able to further understand the ring-walk phenomenon.

Interview participants were asked about ring music. Not every interview participant had selected a song for their ring entry at the time of interview. Most, however, felt that it was important to do so, and expressed that they wanted a song that would get them 'fired up' (Tim, interview), 'pumps you up' (Ben, interview). As Will noted, when it comes to fighting: 'music can give you that extra little edge' (Will, interview). Indeed, music can be specifically designed to produce emotions and feelings (Chapter 8; Solberg, 2014). Whilst the social functions of music are overall beyond the scope of this thesis, it can be noted that outside of the context of boxing, music has in various ways been used as a weapon (Cusik, 2016; Brkich, 2012). In white-collar boxing, music is selected to produce the feeling of transformation into a body-as-weapon.

White-collar boxers enter to music, however, not only to produce feeling. As per the venue, the clothing and ring name, white-collar boxing ring music can be understood as a prop allowing for presentation of self *as if someone else*. Like the ring names under which white-collar boxers are announced, actively drawing upon the language of professional boxing, and indeed the names of professional boxers, so too does the ring music selected by white-collar boxers draw upon these themes. At one event: '[s]omeone had a mix of different rocky songs that they must've made themselves' (field notes, Event C). A popular choice of ring music is that which that the recently-retired Wladimir Klitschko (Olympic gold medallist and former professional heavyweight world champion) recurrently chose: The Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Can't Stop*. Another popular track is *Can't Be Touched* by four-weight world champion turned rapper Roy Jones Jr. The chorus lyrics to this track being 'can't be touched, can't be moved, can't be rocked, can't be shook' are not only performed by a professional boxer, but arguably represent explicitly the pugilist hypermasculinity that professional boxers feel. It proclaims invincibility of the person who enters under its sound. White-collar boxers, having undertaken only eight weeks of training, can most definitely,

however, be touched, moved, rocked and/or shook, lacking the well-honed pugilistic habitus to avoid it.

It is not only that music is important to white-collar boxers to sustain this performance, the timing of entry to the music is important. As discussed in the previous chapter, certain section of songs drop, and this is socially significant, to the extent that in some forms of music these sections are deliberately constructed as to reconstruct social reality (Chapter 8). Waiting for the drop, or where the music kicks in, is important to white-collars. In this regard Simon, for instance, noted of his ring entry:

Simon: 'I timed it just right. When I got into the ring the good bit came on, yeah, it was pretty cool'.

Similarly, those white-collars who had not yet experienced fight night discussed in interview that they had deliberated over this:

Robert: 'I'm not gonna start coming out when that song starts, I'm gonna let it play for over a minute first before I even start comin' out. I wanna get through the whole song'.

It is important to note that Robert is wrong about these times (rounds of white-collar boxing last two minutes each, and there are three, so six minutes of fighting, but also a minute between each round). Moreover, the ring walk does not last three minutes, but at maximum a minute. Nonetheless, that Robert speaks in these terms of the ring walk, suggests that he wished to consume this time in as 'thick' (Wexler, 2015) terms as possible, for the presentation it affords. As will be returned to shortly, other white-collar lads noted similar of the ring walk. Prior to this, however, it is worth noting that female white-collar boxers essentially noted the opposite.

Maude: 'part of me wants to go light-hearted and away from Rocky [in terms of ring music]' (Maude, interview).

Kelly, referring to the introductory talk to the white-collar boxing programme discussed in Chapter 5, noted:

'he was sayin', explaining, you know, you're going to come out in front of all them people, and people'll probably already know the music they're gonna come out to, and stuff like that, and I'm standing there thinkin': 'that's my worst nightmare at the minute'. Comin' out in front of all them people, it's just that is, and he says people'll come out in all sorts, and I'm thinkin'

'they're coming out lovin' it'. I'm gonna come out absolutely bobbini' myself'.

Similarly, Lucy noted:

Like the walking out part I'm a little bit like 'oh shit, everybody's gonna be looking at me' [...] um, it's just that you're the centre of attention for fifteen, thirty seconds or however long that is. A minute, whatever. And um that's not necessarily my preferred place [...] that moment is just hanging isn't it, you can't do anything in that moment to perform, you can't prove you're gonna, you can't do anything. You're just walking, but, everyone's sort of watching you and it's like that anticipation almost. It's the... it's like a hung moment (Lucy, interview).

Whereas the lads considered the ring walk as a time wherein performance 'as if' pro could be enacted, and used music to do so, the above suggests that Lucy, Kelly and Maude do not share this understanding. This further suggests that ring walk time is not best understood in 'chrono-metric' (Thrift, 2004: 874) terms, but as a qualitative experience constructed as meaningful by actors. In this capacity, the ring walk is gendered time. Whilst it lasts 30 seconds in terms of *chronos*, Lucy anticipates experiencing this thirty seconds as static.

Vicki reflects upon her ring walk:

it's a bit of a blur to be honest, I can remember getting in the ring, cos I was worried that I'd like trip the rope or something, so I can remember getting in the ring and I was pleased that I was upright. Um, but I don't remember the walk, obviously, I just felt really nervous.

Unlike Lucy's anticipation that the ring walk would be a hung moment, Vicki recalls that it was a blur. She remembers getting into the ring itself, but does not recall approaching the ring. Whilst immediately, this can be understood in opposition to Lucy's understanding, it is important to recognise the different stages of the white-collar process from which Lucy and Vicki are referring to the ring walk. Lucy's account is anticipatory, whereas Vicki is discussing the ring walk post-fight. Arguably, rushing to the ring is an antidote to the hung moment: both participants noted nervousness in relation to the ring walk, and Vicki's account can be taken as an indication

of acceleration of this time in response to such nervousness. Like the other female participants, who rejected the performative aspects of the ring walk (*i.e.* performance 'as if' pro) so too did Vicki.

That the ring walk lasts at most a minute, but on average 30 seconds is, however, deemed problematic by white-collars lads:

Oliver: I got told the intro music only lasted for about thirty seconds, yeah, I'm not impressed with that.

EW: Why not?

Oliver: Just cos I've got a song that I wanted to play, and it don't really kick in to about thirty seconds in.

Come fight night, things do not always go to plan in this regard. In the following extract, a participant discusses his song choice. Here, this participant is described without pseudonym, as the track makes the participant identifiable. It is an Arctic Monkeys track, the first 50 seconds of which is quiet, whilst the singer tells the story of a 'scumbag', before distorted guitars and drums kick in:

EW: What [ring music] did you have?

P: They Say It Changes When the Sun Goes Down.

EW: Oh the Arctic Monkeys?

P: [singing] 'What a scummy man'... but that's the only bit that played, I was waiting for the music to kick in cos it's quite [singing, mimicking heavy riff and drum beat] and I wanted everybody to get up, but it just finished on the scummy man bit, so it just looked like I was a scab.

The introductory section of this song ends with the question: *He's a scumbag, don't you know?* As this participant climbed through the ropes and into the ring, it was this that played, before his music quickly faded out and his opponent's ring walk commenced. For this participant, therefore, the song that was supposed to facilitate a presentation of self as pro, compromised this presentation. The idealised professional boxer, the white, working-class 'hero' (Rhodes, 2010: 351) is the antithesis of scummy – arguably synonymous, for instance, with 'rough' (Skeggs, 1997: 3). The story of Rocky Balboa is one of becoming respected (Rhodes, 2010;

Whannel, 2008) and it is this career that many white-collars seek to consume through participation in fight night.

### 9.9 Fight

*Last fight of the night. I'm at ringside with a local, but well-known, ex-professional boxer (Fred) cornering a white-collar boxer (Chaz). We're in the red corner. The crowd are pretty feisty by now, having had an afternoon and evening on the drink. As the blue corner made his entrance to the ring through the artificial smoke and strobe lights the crowd are already shouting: 'kill'im!' 'fuck'im up!' 'batter'im!'. I look to the opposing boxer in the blue corner, who - now in clearer vision under spotlights - I see can barely contain his fury. I get the feeling that this is going to be one serious brawl. The referee beckons both fighters to the centre of the ring, I can see his lips are moving, and whilst I know what he's saying, from where I am his speech is inaudible. The fighters touch gloves, momentarily return to their corners, 'seconds out! Round 1!' is announced over the PA system, the bell rings and blue comes out swinging. Chaz gets his nose broken with the first clean punch landed. His face erupted with blood. As his nose erupted so did the crowd. Blue is on the continual offensive, battering Chaz round the ropes, from corner to corner. Under the pressure, Chaz is trying to fight his way out, but this is not working. Fred is shouting 'work with him Chaz! Work **with** him!' urging Chaz to slip or roll off the ropes, or to grab hold of his opponent rather than to fight against him. Chaz never stops throwing back and some connect, he never hits the canvas, but in all three rounds the fight follows the same pattern, and he's taken a solid beating. The fight might have gone a different way, were it not for that first punch (adapted from field notes, Event C).*

Chaz's injury was comparatively serious for white collar boxing – a broken nose, loss of blood – and whilst injury through participation in fight nights (some more serious, others less) is not uncommon, most white-collar boxers leave the ring often exhausted but unscathed, except perhaps for some bruising. Nonetheless, as Nev stated, when you are in the ring, your

opponent is 'trying to knock you out, knock your teeth out, break your nose' (Nev, interview) regardless of whether they succeed. Like other forms of the sport, white collar boxing is 'real' in Oates's (2006: 106) terms: 'the blood shed, the damage suffered, the pain... are unfeigned'. That is, there is a reality to white-collar boxing, in that two people are ultimately in the ring, 'tearin' lumps outta each other' (Craig, interview).

Equally, whilst offering an understanding of the brutality of boxing in comparison to many other sports, Oates's assertion that boxing is real should be treated cautiously (Woodward: 2004, 2007). Woodward (2007: 112) notes that 'the drama and theatricality of boxing' are neglected by Oates through declaring it 'real'. In white-collar boxing, to consume the experience of being a pro boxer, one must get in the ring and exchange blows 'as if' one was a pro boxer, and the theatrical construction of fight night facilitates this enactment.

For Woodward (2007: 112), however, in the context of professional boxing '[t]he entry to the ring [post-ring walk, stepping through the ropes and into the ring] is marked by the moment of disrobing, of removing the fantasy costume'. The context of this is that professional boxers often make their ring entrances in rather dazzling robes. Once in the ring, however, professional boxers get down to business.

Taken to the white-collar boxing context, however, this is not quite the case:

'One person wore a Rocky Balboa dressing gown during their entrance. And called themselves Balboa. [...] He also had stars and stripes shorts on' (field notes, event C)

This white-collar boxer entered the ring wearing a 'fantasy costume', or rather a prop through which the performance could be sustained. Once in the ring, he disrobed, but in doing so revealed another fantasy costume. The shorts worn by this white-collar were a replica of those worn by Rocky in Rocky IV (Walsh, 2015). This is presented as the clearest, most literal example of the notion that, in white-collar boxing, the brutal reality of fighting is inseparable from the drama. As discussed throughout this chapter, though, the whole set-up of fight night amounts to a 'fantasy costume' in Woodward's terms. On entering the ring, white-collar boxers do not remove the fantasy costume, rather they remain in it, and moreover they enter the centre point of what is essentially an environment constructed

in such a way that allows them to perform 'as if' (Seligman *et al.* 2008) they are professional boxers:

'I'd say a white-collar fight is 3 rounds, 2 minutes a round, headgear, and it's scored more on who's the best kind of slugger... a licensed ABA amateur fight would be where it's more about scoring points and havin' a really good technique... I think white collar boxing is something anyone can do, you're matched up based on your abilities broadly speaking and it's scored almost like a professional boxing match would be in the sense that participants tend to be pushing for knockouts, genuinely trying to, uh, not so much show off their technique and have a brilliant defence or anything like that but they are actually having a bit more of a tear-up... so it's a bit more like professional boxing for amateurs really' (Tim, interview).

In this respect, the white-collar boxing observed in this study is similar to the white-collar boxing undertaken in NYC. White-collar boxing matches in NYC are formed of three two-minute rounds (Chapter 2). 16-ounce gloves are worn for competition, compared to the lighter gloves worn in amateur and professional competition. Amateur and professional boxers do not wear head protection. Until 2013 all amateurs did, though it has been deemed unsafe to do so for adult men. In 2018 AIBA plan to make this applicable to all amateur boxers, having since gathered evidence specifically in relation to female boxers. In short, the argument is that wearing a head protector actively increases the possibility of concussion, head gear allowing more damaging shots to be sustained throughout a fight. There is ongoing debate over this (*cf* Dickson and Rempel, 2016). White-collar boxing operates without a scientific understanding either way: headguards are used to give the appearance of safety and professionalism. Trimbur (2013: 133) notes that white-collar boxing is 'brutal and bloody' despite such measures. The below, wherein white-collar boxer boxers describe their fights as being like pub fights, suggests similar.

Whilst fighting in the ring *as if* one was pro is a necessity for the consumption of being a pro, this does not entail boxing *like* a pro. In many cases through sparring the dispositions that pose a hindrance to the core element of boxing are eroded through practice: white-collars learn to punch, and be punched in the face without flinching (Chapter 7). Well-rounded boxers, endowed with plentiful pugilistic capital, are not, however, produced through the



eight-week programme. This is reflected in the fighting. The following extracts, taken from interviews with white-collar boxers interviewed after their fights can be taken to suggest this:

Jack: I think it all goes out the window anyway, when you get to the ring, when that bell's gone, if somebody's comin' at yer.

Nev: The fight itself, it felt like a bloody street fight.

James: It wasn't a boxing match, it was punches coming from angles, angles that shouldn't exist, it was punches that didn't make sense. Um, it was like a pub fight to be honest, it was just arms, everywhere, d'you know what I mean? There wasn't any really boxing about it, it was just a fight.

Richard: It didn't look pretty [...] I just started right-handing, straight, just trying to get him down to the floor, but... it weren't stylish.

Wes: We was told to box, and I wanted to box. [...] but I was just throwin' punches.

Common to these statements is an acknowledgement that the skilful aspects of boxing are not present in white-collar fights. As Jack notes: 'it goes out of the window'. Though 'right-handing' is not a term with purchase in the boxing world, what Richard means when he says this is that, rather than implementing boxing skills, he just continually threw punches with his right hand (*i.e.* his stronger arm) over and over in a bid to knock his opponent to the canvas, regardless of it not looking 'pretty'. The motto for amateur boxing at its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was 'box, don't fight' (Boddy, 2011: 95) – a difference being that boxing is skilled and controlled, whereas fighting is not. Wes noted that he wanted to box, but ended up just throwing punches. There are three main striking motions in boxing: straight shots (jab/cross), hooks and uppercuts (see Chapter 5). When James refers to 'angles' he means that punches in white-collar matches may not follow any of these trajectories. Whilst the referee has warned against windmilling in the preparatory talk given backstage earlier in the day, windmilling is somewhat unavoidable, for lack of long-term refinement of a highly-skilled pugilistic habitus.

One female participant had previously fought on a white-collar event prior to this research and noted of her fight: 'it was a bit of a slugfest really. Um,

a lot of just shots to the head'. Owton's research, which as discussed in Chapter 3, is almost certainly concerned with white-collar boxing, though not referred to in this way, notes similar. Owton's reflections on her boxing match take the form of a poem, which cannot be reproduced in full here. A section of this, however, is as follows:

'Round two, she goes for me, blasting, *pow, pow, THUMP!*

I felt that one; feeling the punches pelting my skull, pounding sensations

More gasps; searching for more air, *WALLOP!*

*SLOSH!* I feel beating brain vibrations'.

(Owton, 2015: 235).

Other 'rounds' in the poem suggest that Owton dished out as much as she took in the above – indeed she won her fight – and in this respect, Owton's account serves as a further suggestion that, in terms of the boxing itself there were no differences between men and women.

#### **9.10 And the Winner is...**

'Ladies and Gentlemen, give it up for your fighters! Both have done amazingly well, so let's have a round of applause! But there can only be one winner.... boxing out of the red corner: Mike 'the Mauler' Evans!' (adapted from field notes: various events).

As discussed in Chapter 2, white-collar boxing elsewhere is non-competitive (Trimbur, 2013). This is not the case in this research context. Even if the quality of competition is not up to professional standard, white-collar boxing is highly competitive. Winners and losers are declared. The referee serves as the judge for competition, from inside the ring. At the end of the fight – which is most often at the end of the third round, though it may be earlier if there is a stoppage – the referee hands his decision on a piece of paper to the MC, who enters the ring. During this time, the fighters are positioned in the centre of the ring, either side of the referee. The MC announces the winner in the manner expressed in the field note above. At this point, the ref raises the hand of the winner.

White-collar interviewees post-fight night were asked about this moment, essentially in the following terms: 'And then, at the end, when your hand gets lifted like that [mimics ref lifting hand to indicate win], how does that feel?' (EW, interview). Responses to this question can be thematically understood as momentous:

Al: '[E]very boy at one point wants to be the world champion, wants to be the boxing world champion, and that was my moment to be that'.

Jack: 'Ah mate, other than, like I say other than gettin' married and my kids being born, that's probably the best night of m'lfe that' (Jack, interview).

Ben: '[W]ell, for me personally, there's almost no other feeling like it. I mean it's the best thing you'd ever experience. The feeling of winning in front of all your friends, all your family, in front of all the people that's come to support yer, all your friends that are boxing there, all the guys that have put the effort into train yer, there's no other feeling like it. Perhaps my daughter being born... only slightly eclipsed that' (Ben, interview).

Wacquant (1995a: 511) notes that '[p]rofessional pugilism enables its devotees to escape the realm of mundanity... into an extra-ordinary, "hyperreal" space in which a purified and magnified masculine self may be achieved'. Between these accounts, it can be argued that white-collar boxing offers participants the possibility of this experience through consumption of its commodified form.

Though on each event there may be one or two draws, essentially, there can only be one winner. The following interview extracts pertain to white-collar lads' experiences of losing:

Nev: I felt devastated. I was probably, for four, five days after, like I say, I had the time off work, literally, I stayed in bed for three days. So embarrassed kind of thing.

Ben: Umm... quite disheartening. Very disheartening to be honest. Yeah. Um, I knew it would be a difficult fight and maybe... m-maybe... maybe that sort of affected the way I fought, the way I performed. Um, it was called by the ref, a lot of people watchin' me said that I should've won the fight, or it should've been at

least a draw. Obviously the referee sees it how he calls it [...] he don't always call it right. Um, there were a few decisions that were a bit suspect. So that was probably more disappointing for me because I know I gave it my all, so to say I've lost, but the disappointment and that lasted just on the night.

Anthony: strangely not as bad as I thought it was gonna feel. Because it was a good fight. If I'd have got into that ring and got absolutely battered... I'd have obviously been quite annoyed and disappointed in myself. But because it was that close the entire way through, and then he beat me right at the end, fairly so, I made a mistake, I was a bit annoyed I made the mistake, but, he deserved it, and I felt I'd took a lot out of it. This humility almost that I didn't mind losing. I liked that he won. And then when I got out nobody said 'oh you lost, you didn't do very well'... everyone was like 'you just had a fight, good on you, you did well'.

As suggested in Chapter 8, losing entails the potential of loss of face (Goffman, 1959). The above accounts suggest this further. Between these accounts it can be suggested that white-collar adopt techniques to come to terms with, and indeed overcome, loss. Ben implicates the ref/judge and their decision-making; Anthony, conceptualises his performance as good, drawing on the feeling that he did not get absolutely battered as a 'moral' (Goffman, 1963) victory. Similarly, though Nev felt 'devastated', he continued to conceptualise his fight as being better than other possible outcomes:

EW: Yeah. And it didn't go the distance?

Nev: Pfff no, 89 seconds.

EW: Right, so we're talking first round...

Nev: We are, we are. Yeah, we are, yeah. But, it's better than 88 though Ed.

In other words, efforts are made by participants who have lost their matches to recast loss as win. Indeed, a common trope in white-collar boxing is that 'everyone is a winner just for getting in there, in that not many people would do it' (field notes, various). In this respect, though Nev felt devastated, he also felt like Rocky:

Nev: again it's like, I thought it's like, I felt like Rocky.

EW: Yeah?

Nev: Yeah that kind of thing, yeah.

EW: What d'you mean by that?

Nev: I mean, it's the real deal, obviously, I mean, it's on a lower level, but it's what boxers do, isn't it?

De Garis (2010: 936) notes that '[o]ne can, at least marginally, become a 'boxer'... by the act of boxing'. Indeed, beneath the rituality of fight night, people are still boxing. However, as the above quotation from Nev suggests, fight night is not about marginally becoming a boxer, but about becoming 'the real deal'. As this chapter has argued, fight night, whilst retaining a corporeal sincerity, is sustained through ritual action that produces a subjunctive reality that stands in contrast to the mundane reality of the everyday in insincere terms. To understand white-collar boxing, therefore, it is necessary to adapt De Garis's statement above: one can act *as if* they are 'the real deal' world-champion boxer through the act of boxing, if surrounded by props that sustain such an appearance.

Will: When your hand gets lifted, and your name is said and everybody cheers, it's just, it's just white-collar boxing, I say that, but it feels real. It feels so real. It's just, it's brilliant, and then you know you're in there for only another couple of, another ten, twenty seconds or so, so you just milk it, milk it again, this is part of the experience. I've done all this work for these twenty seconds now, now I'm gonna get my hand lifted, in the ring, in front of over a thousand people or however many it may be, and this is what I've been working for.

EW: So, when you say 'it feels real', what do you mean by that?

Will: It feels like I am Carl Froch fighting George Groves at Wembley [...] That's what it feels like. Um, to me. I mean, I've never fought George Groves at Wembley, so... but everybody's there, there's over a thousand people just lookin' at me, in that ring, and y'know, it makes you feel proud as well. Like, you're doin' somethin' like that. Just to be there, not even to win. Just to be there.

The second Froch-Groves match, a world title fight held at Wembley, had the highest attendance of any boxing match in the UK post-World War II (Dirs, 2014). Noting this perhaps contextualises Will's feelings here. Competing in a white-collar boxing match felt like he was at the pinnacle of professional boxing.

Will notes that it is not winning that constructs this experience, but that 'just to be there' allows for its consumption. This is in some respects an innocuous statement. This phrase, and other phrases like it (e.g. being there, I have been there) are used throughout social life. However, it is also an ontological statement. Indeed 'being there' is the meaning of Dasein – a central component of Heidegger's (1927/2010) phenomenological ontology. However, Will locates the 'there' of this scenario as Wembley, and that his being as that of a world champion professional boxer: 'it feels like I am Carl Froch'. Neither of these are the case, and Dasein therefore this is not: to be there, for Will, is being like someone else, somewhere else. This feeling is sustained through the ritual actions explored in this chapter, which construct a subjunctive reality from which this experience can be consumed.

Will knows that what he feels is not real: 'it's only white-collar boxing, but it feels real'. In other words, Will recognises, though not in these exact terms, that fight night is a subjunctive, insincere universe, and that the feelings produced by fight night of being Carl Froch are ultimately a betrayal. As Seligman *et al.* note (2008, 25-26), actors in the subjunctive universe participate 'conscious that such a subjunctive world exists in endless tension with an alternate world of their daily experience'. That is, he knows that he is not Froch and he knows that he is not at Wembley. Likewise, he knows that he is Will, and that 'it is only white-collar boxing' in which newcomers to the sport participate in a minimal amount of training and a boxing match.

White-collar boxing can be understood as an inaccurately-named phenomenon, in that white-collar boxers are not necessarily white-collar workers, and that unlike its original (NYC) context white-collar boxers are not part of a metropolitan elite social class (Chapter 6). However, there were a few participants, who, whilst not in possession of equivalent capital stocks to white-collar boxers in NYC, were locatable as 'dominant' in terms of social class. These participants were a minority at Shadcote, and they consumed white-collar boxing in a qualitatively different capacity to the majority. Richard is one such participant. Richard was interviewed post-fight night, and reflected on winning:

EW: Yeah, and when you won, how did that feel?

Richard: ... it felt like I'd done, I'd done what I set out to do, eight weeks ago.

EW: Yeah?

Richard: Well, I saw everybody stood up clapping and cheering, yeah, just... just felt alright...

EW: Yeah... so, what was it like being in front of like, like there were a good eight hundred people there, or something like that?

Richard: Yeah.

EW: Did you enjoy that? Or?

Richard: Yeah. I wouldn't say... yeah, I enjoyed it, but, I'm also kind of a realist, that, they won't remember, it'll only be your mates that remember that it happened.

When Richard notes that he is a realist, he can be understood to be speaking in 'sincere' terms about the fight night, that is, in terms that indicate a rejection of the subjunctive. Whereas the lads above noted that the feeling of winning was momentous, for Richard, it 'just felt alright'. This serves as an important reminder that consumption should not be understood in terms of a distinct subject and object. Rather, agents bestow objects (meant broadly as anything that can be consumed) with meaning according to taste, which as this thesis has suggested differs in late modernity according to social class. Richard, in being in a dominant position in social life beyond the boxing club, did not consume the feeling of being dominant.

Though interview data are lacking on the experience of winning and losing for women – the one female participant interviewed post-fight was also the only interview participant in this study to have drawn their match – data regarding anticipation in these terms is available. In a similar capacity to Richard, female participants noted that winning *per se* was relatively unimportant, beyond the night itself:

Maude: 'It's not about, it's not about, it's not about winning and losing, afterwards. Like, obviously, it is in the moment, but at the end it's not'.

EW: ... what are you looking forward to about fight night in particular?

Lucy: I think the end, in the nicest possible way. I'm not *not* looking forward to the whole thing, um, but that kind of finish line feeling, y'know? I'm looking forward to hopefully being victorious. If not, it's not gonna be the end of the world though, y'know, I'm not gonna sort of sulk off, or, throw my gloves on the floor or anything, stomp out the ring, or anything'.

These accounts should be treated cautiously, in that they do not reflect the experience of fight night, but perceptions of forthcoming fight nights. Nonetheless, they can be taken as a suggestion that the experience of fight night is gendered. Rachel and Maude understood fight night to not being about winning or losing, unlike the lads, for whom losing was devastating and for whom winning produced the feeling of being like a world champion.

### **9.11 Back to the Midlands**

After the fight, fighters must exit the ring. Unlike the ring walk, a ritual act which sustains the subjunctive, insincere reality that the entrant is a pro boxer, leaving the ring can be understood as a reversion to the sincerity of the 'everyday' (Seligman *et al.*, 2008: 7). Will's account above, acknowledging the feeling of being like Froch will only last for twenty seconds can be understood in this way. His implication is that the feeling fades upon leaving the ring. The following field note relays the form that leaving the ring takes:

'The exit from the ring is nowhere near as spectacular as the entrance. Not on elevated walkway. Down the side. Straight to paramedic.' (fieldnotes, event C).

Approximately 15 minutes earlier, these fighters had entered the ring on an elevated walkway. On leaving the ring, however, white-collars leave down a dark gully along the side of this walkway. Whilst not all events had an elevated walkway, common to all exits from the ring observed in this study, is that there was, in short, no 'razzamatazz' (Woodward, 2007: 112). White-collars are actively rushed out of the ring, sometimes being physically marched by Shadcote staff to speed up this exit. Fight nights being a precise operation, there is by this stage, a new pair of fighters behind the curtain



waiting to cross the threshold and make their walk to the ring as if they were professionals (who, in fifteen minutes time, will also be leaving the ring in the manner described above). Backstage – after a quick check by the paramedics – the handwraps, boots, shorts, and vest all come off, in most cases never to be put back on.

There is a melancholia to the subjunctive (Southard, 1916). As Seligman *et al.* (2008: 23) note, the 'as if' can be understood to contain 'could be' or 'what if': 'what if we spent our life together, we slept together, what if he were dead and out of my way, I had her jewellery or beauty, I was the boss and he worked for me'. That is, the subjunctive is a mode through which desires, all but impossible, can be enacted. As this chapter has suggested, these lads desire the respect accorded to boxing heroes, and consume this experience through acting 'as if' this were the case.

In *Under the Moonlight*, Marlon Brando plays an ex-professional boxer, Terry Malloy, who was forced to lose in a match fixed by the mob, ruining his chance at a title shot. Famously, Malloy mourns this circumstance: 'I coulda had class, I coulda been a contender, I coulda been *somebody*'. Wacquant draws upon this line, as a means of understanding professional boxing:

'To be somebody! That's what it's all about. To escape from anonymity, from dreariness... A boxer in the ring is a being who screams with all his heart, with all his body: "I want to be someone. I exist"' (Wacquant, 2004: 230).

White-collar boxers, having trained for eight weeks, could never be a contender, though a desire to be so remains. This desire, ultimately a desire to be respected, formed at the intersections of class, gender, nation and race, is projected onto the object, and it is this that white-collar lads consume. That is, a white-collar boxer in the ring screams: 'I want to be someone else. I want to be Rocky Balboa. I want to be Carl Froch'. White-collar boxing commodifies this desire as an experience to be consumed through ritual action.

Whilst white-collar boxing is presented as being 'free' in monetary terms, and for charity, this narrative has been thoroughly debunked (Chapter 5). White-collar boxers, through taking part in fight night, consume an experience which has been paid for by ticket sales in which they are the object of consumption. In this way, white-collar boxing differs from professional boxing: professional boxers are aware of their commodification

and exploitation, that they are unlikely to make the big-time, though operate according to the belief that they will be the exception to that rule (Wacquant, 1995a, 2001; Woodward, 2014). White-collar boxing purports to offer the exceptional experience to every participant, and being presented as free obscures from immediate understanding that any value extraction occurs. The feeling of fame, moreover, whilst on offer to all, is always illusory.

White-collar boxing can be understood simultaneously as a production line and a consumption experience of the idealised professional boxing career: a lifetime condensed into eight weeks. Stepping out of the ring on fight night marks the end of both. The experience of a lifetime can only be experienced once, and it is this that white-collar boxers consume, in that they consume in eight weeks a commodified reproduction of a career which takes years to build. Post-fight, this consumption is complete, and white-collar boxers become worthless in terms of the white-collar boxing economy. If the social reality of professional boxers is that most, even if they do get a shot at the big time, end up on the 'scrap-heap' (Smith, 2014: 13, *cf.* Oates, 2006: 60-61), so too is the case for white-collars. In this way, white-collar boxing reproduces, in accelerated and insincere terms, the career of the professional boxer, from beginning to end.

'I'll be back! I'm doing the next one'. What everybody says, but no one ever does.' (field notes, event B).

## 10. Conclusion

### 10.1 Introduction

The final bell of the last fight of the night rings, the winner is announced, and both fighters unceremoniously exit the ring. Following this, the MC announces the end of the show, wishing the crowd a safe journey home. The music stops, the venue lights are switched on, the crowd are ushered out by the doormen, and fight night draws abruptly to an end. These actions commit fight night to the past, and produce a reversion to the mundane world.

The day after fight night the gym is quiet. There are no white-collars present, nor will there be for another month or so. The club lads are in attendance, though this number is depleted. Some will have worked at fight night, and are therefore taking Monday off training. Fight night is 'spoken about a little bit, but not too much' (fieldnotes, March), and the club lads 'laughingly say that we'll never see the WCs again, even though they all say they're coming back' (fieldnotes, March). Talk at Shadcote is now oriented towards the next white-collar intake, due in a month, and increasingly so as it draws nearer. During the run up to the next intake a few unknown people 'pop in' to the club to enquire about doing the next one, who, in four weeks' time, will enter Shadcote Boxing Club for their eight-week boxing experience. In other words, white-collar boxing is a cyclical process that repeats over time. This thesis has outlined this process.

Prior to this research, there was only one existing sociological account of white-collar boxing (Trimbur, 2013). Trimbur provides an excellent account of how, under post-industrial conditions, a gym in NYC survives through allowing elite men – for instance lawyers, stockbrokers, neurologists and celebrities – to train for a high economic price. However, this explanation nowhere near suffices for this research context. Whilst sharing a name with the white-collar boxing conducted in NYC, the white-collar boxing analysed in this research is a very different phenomenon. Prior to this thesis, there was effectively no research on the type of boxing analysed in this research. This research therefore makes the leap from zero and one, from nothing and something, in terms of knowledge on white-collar boxing as it exists in the UK. Nothing is ever *entirely* original, but this research arguably does come

close: it is the first research ever conducted on this topic, and is therefore, highly novel throughout by default. Rather than synthesise this thesis chapter-by-chapter, the following section is ordered according to the research questions identified in Chapters 2 and 3, as a means of drawing together the findings presented throughout this thesis. In doing so, the contributions to knowledge this research makes are presented, beyond the above.

## **10.2 Contributions to Knowledge**

### **10.2.1 Research question one: What is white-collar boxing?**

The most basic (though this is not to say simple) answer to this question is that the very term white-collar boxing is misleading; white-collar boxing is not what it first seems. Within this context, the term is shorn of its wider social meaning (*cf.* Mills, 2002). This was discussed throughout this thesis, though particularly in Chapter 6: white-collar boxers either rejected this meaning as applicable to their experience of white-collar boxing, or did not know that this is what is meant by the term white-collar beyond the boxing context. Rather, white-collar boxing is understood as an eight-week, beginners' course in boxing, culminating in a fight night. Betrayed by language, where white-collar boxing beyond NYC is referenced in passing by other scholars (Trimbur, 2013; Woodward, 2014), the presumption has been that white-collar boxing reflects the NYC context. It can be said, informed by this research, that this is emphatically not the case.

White-collar boxing is a process entailing the condensed reproduction of the idealised career of the professional boxer, commodified for consumption through which the subjunctive can be performed. Such a process is, to date, absent from the literature. Chapters 5-9 outline this process: participants enter the gym (Chapter 5), learn the rudiments of boxing through sparring (Chapter 7), participate in a weigh-in (Chapter 8), and compete at fight night (Chapter 9). This process takes eight weeks, and having completed this, participants rarely return to boxing. In this capacity – in terms of the social construction of time and its commodification – white-collar boxing is a quintessentially late-modern experience. It is a life-time career offered as a short-term consumption experience. As the answers to the questions below will discuss further, however, the implications this has in terms of identity formation do not mirror the orthodoxy of theorists of late modernity.

White-collar boxing is on the margins of the political economy of boxing. Amateur and professional boxing are well-established versions of the sport, and essentially exist in symbiosis (Chapter 2). White-collar boxing presents a way in which Shadcote Boxing Club can be involved in competitive boxing without having to submit to amateur or professional boxing authorities (Chapter 5). Amateur boxing is also rejected as the market values by which Shadcote operates clash with the very notion of amateurism. In this respect, white-collar boxing can be understood as a form of unlicensed boxing, and should be understood to contribute to the limited literature on unlicensed boxing (Chapter 2). Whilst professional boxing is a separate entity to white-collar boxing, the latter reproduces an idealised version of the former. White-collar boxing offers for consumption the career of a professional boxer. Chapters 8 and 9 provide the clearest indications of this: the weigh-in white-collar boxers undertake prior to fight night replicates the weigh-ins held prior to professional title fights, and fight night itself is a reproduction of a world title fight, wherein white-collars can perform as if they are professionals in these terms.

In terms of wider political economy beyond boxing: white-collar boxing is a philanthrocapitalist arrangement (Chapter 5). White-collar boxing is presented as being free in monetary terms. This is not the case. Rather, the cost of participation is derived from the cost of tickets that white-collar boxers are mandated to sell in order to participate. Minimally, white-collar boxers must sell twenty tickets and contained within their cost is surplus value. White-collar boxers must also raise money for charity, independently of selling tickets. The inclusion of charity in this model obscures that white-collar boxing is an exercise in profiteering. This finding presents a development in studies of philanthrocapitalism. Whereas other philanthrocapitalist arrangements detail the ways in which charity is a 'lucrative industry' (McGoey, 2014: 111) and operate foremost as businesses (Sweeney and Killoran-McKibbin, 2016), the arrangement here is one wherein charity is commodified by business, and included in the process as to increase its revenue, and ultimately value.

### **10.2.2 Research question two: How do social divisions co-ordinate practice in white-collar boxing?**

Boxing is often cited as a sport in which the social divisions of class, race and gender intersect in various ways to co-ordinate practice (e.g. Carrington, 2010; Woodward, 2007; Wacquant, 2004; Trimbur, 2013; Sugden, 1996). This thesis builds upon this knowledge in various ways, in the context of a new version of the sport emergent in late modernity.

White-collar boxing is unusual, in that unlike most sports it contains within its title a signifier of social class (Trimbur, 2013). In the NYC context, this signifier more or less correctly signifies the social class of practitioner. As discussed above, this is not the case in white-collar boxing at Shadcote. In this regard, white-collar boxing in this research context is doubly unusual: white-collar boxers are not necessarily white-collar workers, nor do they occupy the class positions with which the term is often related. This alone represents a major contribution to knowledge: prior to this research, Trimbur's account stood for all white-collar boxing practices, which does not account for this arrangement.

This is not to say that all white-collar boxers are working-class, or that all white-collar boxers occupy the same position in social space (Chapter 6). Whilst no white-collar boxers occupy social space analogous to white-collar boxers in NYC, white-collar boxers occupy multiple class positions. That participants were locatable at various positions in social space and seems, at first, to align with Bauman's (2007, 2013b) understanding of consumption: in second modernity, wherein production has been replaced by consumption as the dominant economic mode, it is said that class ceases to be meaningful. However, this thesis has suggested that social class remains meaningful in this distinctly late modern consumption practice. The qualitative consumption experience of white-collar boxing differs according to social class (Chapter 6). This finding also represents a development in Bourdieusian theory. As discussed in Chapter 2, to borrow from Woodward (2014: 61): 'boxing is the sport of the poor in spite of intermittent forays of the aristocracy into the ring and more recent celebrations of white-collar boxing'. For its aforementioned history, boxing has been understood as a prime example of the Bourdieusian understanding of the relationship between class and consumption (Atkinson, 2015) (Chapters 3 and 6). Bourdieu (1988a, 2010) has noted in and beyond the context of sport that: 'at different times... the same practices have been able to attract aristocratic

or popular devotees' 'should warn us against the temptation of trying to explain the class distribution of sports purely in terms of the 'nature' of the various activities' (Bourdieu, 2010: 212). This is subject to amendment via the analysis presented in this thesis (particularly Chapter 6). Participants, differently distributed in social space consume white-collar boxing in qualitatively different terms that essentially map onto the Bourdieusian understanding of the relationship between class and taste *at the same time*.

White-collar boxers in NYC are white upper-class men, who participate in the sport for what it is presumed to offer in terms of consuming the identity of the black, working-class masculine other (Trimbur, 2013). Boxing in Britain is not racialised to the same extent as boxing in the USA, which reflects the racial demography of the class structure (Chapter 3; Rhodes, 2011). The racialised dynamic present in Trimbur's research is absent in the context of Shadcote. The white-collar boxers in this research were overwhelmingly white, though this whiteness cannot be taken to signify social class. This is not to say that race is absent in this research – race is not a synonym for black (Ignatiev, 1995) – and whiteness is a contested category in the gym.

Boxing has often been informed by migration (Weinberg and Arond, 1978; Woodward, 2014). A major contemporary migration between Eastern and Western Europe currently exists (*cf.* Favell, 2008). This pattern of migration is not discussed in relation to boxing elsewhere in literature, and is here recognised as significant to practice. There was a minority of men from various countries in Eastern Europe present at the boxing club participating in white-collar boxing. The Eastern European lads in this study, upon entry to the gym, did not understand sparring to be a collaborative exercise wherein domination is not the aim (Chapter 7). Interview data were limited with this group (Chapter 4), however the limited data available located this as feeling natural, whilst simultaneously locating this within social structure. The approach to sparring displayed by these men is not natural, but the naturalisation of the intersections of gender and nationality within the body.

In being embodied and naturalised, this is experienced by the English lads as natural difference. Migrants were racialised in the gym, constructed in such a way that they were ontologically different from the white, English lads. This minority of participants are constructed as not entirely human. This construction is similar to other racisms found in other boxing contexts (*cf.* Carrington, 2002; Chapter 3). Being constructed in this way enables

their violent reprimanding in the gym (Chapter 7). This dehumanisation also informs practice at fight night (Chapter 9), wherein national identity is variously reproduced: Englishness is celebrated, whereas the Eastern European lads on entry to the ring are denigrated.

White-collar boxing is mostly undertaken by men, and the majority of this thesis is therefore about male white-collar boxers. This is further reflected upon in section 10.3. It can also be taken, however, as a first indication that white-collar boxing is gendered. Boxing has historically been an engagement largely undertaken by men (Sugden, 1996), and this remains the case in white-collar boxing. Equally, unlike white-collar boxing in NYC, women are not excluded from this version of the sport: whilst women are present at Gleason's Gym, they are excluded from white-collar boxing. In this research context, women do participate in white-collar boxing. Whilst significantly fewer in number than male white-collar boxers, that number is not zero, as is the case in NYC. Prior to this thesis, academic knowledge indicated that white-collar boxing was for men only, and this is not the case. Whilst data are limited compared to men, this thesis is therefore the first account of women's white-collar boxing.

It has been variously noted that female boxers (and martial artists) feel uncomfortable participating in the violent aspects of boxing, and that this is articulated by female boxers as being the natural result of being women (Trimbur, 2013; Nash, 2015; Velija *et al.*, 2013). This research found similar, though specifically locates this disposition within a gendered habitus formed prior to interaction at the gym, thereby integrating this into a wider system of social relations and theory of embodiment. Prior to this thesis, the experience of male boxers new to the sport has not been considered in these terms. Gender being relational (Connell, 2005), this is a short-coming of the literature. This thesis makes a first step in addressing this issue. Whereas women fear hurting others, men fear getting hurt (Chapter 7). This fear, whilst inwardly felt, is locatable beyond the individual. The face is at risk in sparring, and being hit in the face does not only do physical injury, but social injury. Through practice, the lads learn to negotiate this risk, and learn to gain respect through sparring. Whilst these dispositions that men and women tend to embody upon entry to the gym feel natural, they are not. Through purposeful action in different fields this disposition can be reformulated in a short timeframe. As discussed, at fight night (Chapter 9),



the difference in boxing aptitude between male and female white-collar boxers is indiscernible.

The experiences of both the weigh-in (Chapter 8) and fight night (Chapter 9) differ according to gender. Counter-intuitively, the weigh-in does not serve the purpose of ascertaining the weights of white-collar boxers ahead of their fights. The weigh-in also serves the purpose of revelation – white-collars find out who they will be fighting via announcement at the weigh-in – and it is this capacity the weigh-in retains meaning for the men, whilst being stripped of its nominal function. Whereas the lads engage in the weigh-in as a serious activity for its revelatory function, the weigh-in does not have this purpose for the women, who, during the training have been informed in unceremonious terms who their opponent will be. As such, women are excluded from participating in the weigh-in. Whilst white-collar boxing matches are not made on weight, weights are announced as to reproduce the experience of a professional weigh-in. Women's weights, however, are not announced; the stigma surrounding women's weight in and beyond boxing (Cordell and Ronai, 2017; Paradis, 2012) is reproduced at the weigh-in.

For the white-collar lads, both are experiences through which the subjunctive is consumed. White-collar lads, through both of these experiences, perform 'as if' they are elite level pro boxers. In doing so, they consume the respect afforded to the white working-class boxing hero Rocky Balboa (Chapters 3, 7, 8 and 9). Watching Rocky allows for the occupation, in psychic terms, of the identity of Rocky Balboa (Walkerdine, 1986). White-collar boxing represents a development of this dynamic. Rather than occupying in psychic terms respectable identity through voyeurism, white-collar boxing allows for the consumption of the respect afforded to the white-working class boxing hero through active, participatory performance. In contrast, the subjunctive, 'insincere' reality of both the weigh-in and fight night is rejected by female white-collar boxers – it is also rejected by the middle-class men.

### **10.2.3 Research question three: What can white-collar boxing contribute to the understanding of the construction of identity in late modernity?**

In summary, this final, theoretical question was posed for the following reasons: white-collar boxing has previously been noted as a practice emergent in late modernity in which there is a relationship between identity and consumption (Trimbur, 2013). Class identity is supposed to have waned in significance in late modernity (Bauman, 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Yet in being *white-collar* boxing, a signifier of class identity is directly present in the name of a late modern consumption practice. Equally, as first suggested in Chapter 2, and elaborated at length in Chapter 6, white-collar boxing is a misleading term regarding the social class of practitioner in this context. Boxing more widely has also been discussed in relation to liquid modernity in terms of gender (Woodward, 2007; Matthews, 2016) – the argument essentially being that, unlike the majority of social reality, which is characterised by ontological uncertainty, boxing is a bastion of solidity. Clearly, white-collar boxing presents a novel scenario through which to theorise upon the construction of identity in late modernity.

In some respects, white-collar boxing is a quintessentially late modern project. Instant gratification, short-termism and consumption are characteristics of the late modern condition (Bauman, 2000, 2017; Chapter 3), whereas delayed gratification, long-termism and production are all characteristics of the career of a professional boxer (Wacquant, 1995b, 2004; Chapter 3), professional boxing being a distinctly modern phenomenon (Chapter 2). Indeed, white-collar boxing reproduces the career of the professional boxer in idealised terms, for consumption with an eight-week timeframe (Chapter 5).

For Bauman (2005) identity must be derived through consumption and continually worked on as a project. This thesis has argued that whilst white-collar boxing is characteristic of late modernity, that Bauman's conceptualisation of identity is deficient for this research context. Whilst white-collar boxing viewed from afar might look like it offers instant reformulation of identity through consumption, through 'being there' (Becker, 1966: 56) it becomes apparent that whilst the white-collar boxer consumes the experience of being a professional boxer, they remain a rookie. Instant reformulation of identity is not on offer. As discussed above in relation to research question two, white-collar boxers are not consumers

before they are anything else; identities formed outside of consumption prior to engagement in white-collar boxing in terms social class, gender and race inform the qualitative consumption experience of white-collar boxing.

In late modernity, class identity is supposedly only existent in a zombified state (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Chapter 3). White-collar boxing raises interesting questions in this regard, as it contains a class signifier in its title whilst being a practice particular to late modernity. Indeed, in Trimbur's (2013) context, Beck's argument is straightforwardly inapplicable; the term is deliberately employed as to signify that the social class of practitioner differs from amateur and professional boxers. In this research context, things are not so straightforward (Chapter 6). The term white-collar does not correctly signify the social class of white-collar boxers. This may 'seem' (Berger, 1963: 34) to indicate that social class ceases to be meaningful in this boxing practice. Indeed, for Bauman (e.g. 2007) the society of consumers has ushered the demise of class-based practices, and white-collar boxers do not all occupy the same position in social space, whilst consuming the same product. However, analysing how white-collar boxing is consumed in qualitative terms, as discussed above in relation to question two, indicates that class distinctions are maintained in white-collar boxing, whilst being consumed by multiple social classes simultaneously. *White-collar* here is not a zombie signifier, as much as it is a misleading signifier, and class identity informs practice in this late modern consumption experience.

Identity is about where we feel at home, where we feel out of place, where we do and do not belong (Atkinson, 2015; Bourdieu, 1989). For Bauman (1996, 2004), the conditions for belonging that ordered practice in first modernity no longer exist; we are all treading individualised paths with no collective referents for identity, and with no end in sight. In other words, social class, gender and race for Bauman, cease to be meaningful sources of identity and identity must be continually constructed through consumption. Bauman's social theory is not built on rigorous, empirical research (Rattansi, 2014; Kilminster, 2017), and whilst his scholarship is a highly useful reference point through which to locate white-collar boxing within history, it has been argued throughout this thesis that his conceptualisation of identity as a component of his wider social theory is inapplicable to this context. As the answers to question two indicate, the boxing club is ordered according to social class, gender and (racialised)

nationality, all of which exist as referents for identity outside of consumption. Through these divisions participants derive a sense of place in the world, including the boxing club. The boxing club, being Rick's product, is a shrine to tough, white, English working-class manhood (Chapter 5), and the majority of the white-collar lads felt at home in the club, being tough, white, English working-class men (Chapter 6). The women located their hesitations in sparring as the result of being women (Chapter 7), the Eastern European men felt out of place at the club (Chapter 5), related to each other over being from Eastern Europe (Chapter 5) and were understood by the white-collar lads as of a different race (Chapter 7 and 9). It should be noted here that Bauman does not discuss race in his scholarship and critique from Rattansi (2017a, 2017b) is currently emerging in this regard. The findings from this study therefore contribute significantly to an emerging body of criticism regarding race in Bauman's scholarship.

Bauman (2012) has noted that ethnographic reports tend to relay social life in terms of meaningfully-felt social divisions, attributing this to ethnographers' selection of field sites. The implication is that these field sites are few and far between, scattered within a world which is otherwise now liquid. An obvious rebuttal to the above would be that Shadcote is one such field site. However, this thesis studied entry into Shadcote from the world beyond it and participants arrived there from multiple locations. White-collar boxers do not enter the gym as atomised individuals, but as social beings whose perceptions, thoughts and actions, whilst being inwardly felt, are locatable beyond the individual and formed through interaction prior to entry to the gym.

By focusing on the ways in which white-collar boxers enter the gym, the idea that the boxing gym is a bastion of masculinity in an otherwise now liquid world, is challenged by this thesis. It is not that the boxing club is not highly gendered, but that the world in which it is situated is too. As discussed in relation to question two, women enter the gym fearful of hurting others and men fearful of getting hurt, and these dispositions are necessarily produced through socialisation throughout the life course prior to entry to the gym, in other words in gendered habituses.

This is not to say that social life is completely inert, and that we are automata entirely bound by social structure. Whilst habitus is durable it is not entirely unyielding, and through exposure to and engagement in novel social fields can be reformulated. Through practice in the gym – as discussed at length

in Chapter 7 in the context of sparring – dispositions can change. These changes are relatively piecemeal, however, and even then, require an element of suffering, painful practice. White-collar boxers do not become professional boxers within the eight-weeks that they train, despite what is offered for consumption – transit from rookie to Rocky – and all of this suggests that the idea that identity is up for instant reformulation in the late modern world through consumption is flawed.

As per the argument developed in Chapter 3 – white-collar boxing therefore relies on identities formed outside of consumption to operate. Whereas Bauman's (1996) argument is that identity formation has shifted from pilgrim to tourist along the lines of modernity marks one and two, this thesis has suggested that the pilgrim – in this case the pro boxer – has not ceased to exist, but that the career of the pro boxer is commodified, and consumable via touristic consumption in ersatz terms. White collar boxing is tourism of pilgrimage.

It is not sufficient only to state, however, that Bauman's conception of identity is inapplicable here without offering a positive, active conceptualisation of identity construction in this late modern practice. Through qualitative analysis of action, this thesis has argued that the white-collar boxing consumption experience is a simultaneous consumption and production of the subjunctive through performance. In other words, white-collar boxers can perform 'as if' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 20) they are top level professionals through participation.

The weigh-in and fight night are commodified reproductions of the weigh-ins and fight nights usually reserved for elite level professional boxers competing for titles. The weigh-in provides a transitional moment through which training is committed to the past and fight night produced as present. This thesis drew upon Seligman *et al.* (2008) as a means through which to understand this ritual action. Sociological orthodoxy suggests that rituals reproduce a stable present, whereas the aforementioned scholars note that rituals sustain a subjunctive universe. The weights recorded and reported are meaningless, though the weigh-in retains meaning as an exercise through which white-collars can perform, in insincere terms, 'as if' they are professionals (Chapter 8). One clear example of this can be found in the ring names selected for fight night, representing the subjunctive and the continued existence of an everyday identity. The ring name is the insincere, whereas the everyday name – within which the ring name is contained – is

the sincere. The white-collars are not self-selecting identity as much as temporarily performing 'as if' they are someone else.

This ritual, subjunctive performance of identity, sustained through consumption, does not imply that there is a lack of sincere identity formed throughout the life course in terms discussed throughout this thesis. In fact, the desire to participate in this subjunctive reality is locatable at the intersections of class, race and gender. For the most part, white-collar boxers are white, working-class men, and participation is underpinned by a desire to be respected in these terms. It is not identity as such that is being consumed, but rather the consumption of feeling valued. The performance of identity at both the weigh-in and fight night exists both in contradiction to and as a desire born from the sincere identities of participants. The limited data available pertaining to female white-collar boxers further suggests this: their consumption of the insincere is reluctant, indeed the opportunity to consume white-collar boxing in these terms is quashed. Whereas in other forms of the sport this is the primary purpose of the weigh-in (*cf.* Sugden, 1996; Heiskanen, 2006) here this purpose is lacking. Rather, the weigh-in exists as 'window-dressing' in Rick's terms, as a ritual through which the experience of being a professional can be consumed. This is deemed surplus to requirement by the women, who do not wish to consume white-collar boxing in these terms.

If the two major identity camps in sociology are essentially Baumanite and Bourdieusian (Adams, 2006; Atkinson, 2010), then overall this thesis supports the Bourdieusian version. However, Bourdieusian theory is also insufficient in elucidating identity in white-collar boxing. Bourdieu's (1988b, 2000) theory centres on subjects endowed with knowledge in embodied terms, that is, subjects with practical mastery. This is immediately represented in Wacquant's (1995a, 1995b, 2004) scholarship and extended to matters of boxing identity. Through long-term, passionate engagement in the pugilistic field, boxers restructure the self, and the sport becomes figurative of 'innermost identity and... place in the public realm' (Wacquant, 1995a: 507). White-collar boxers on the other hand, lack practical mastery in terms of boxing, and this Bourdieusian account therefore becomes limited. Sense of place is derived through classed, gendered and racialised habituses for white-collar boxers, but the habituses they embody are not pugilistic habituses in the capacity expressed by Wacquant. Seligman *et al.* (2008) account for action in a way that does not rely on sincere, proficient subjects.

Through myriad ritual actions at the weigh-in and fight night, practical mastery can be performed in its absence. Through consumption, the identity of the pro boxer is subjunctively performed.

### **10.3 Possibilities for future research**

Given that the vast majority of white-collar boxers are men, this study inevitably focused largely on men white-collar boxing. Whilst this research was in its planning stages, before fieldwork commenced, Shadcote ran a white-collar boxing programme exclusively for women, and it had been planned to focus on this programme for this research. However, this programme was not renewed by Shadcote, and had ended by the time the field research commenced. Elsewhere white-collar boxing programmes are held exclusively for women, and further research should be conducted at these events. Though this is bound to be speculation, had women not been in the minority for this research, the findings produced would have been very different.

White-collar boxing is a form of unlicensed boxing, a term encompassing many boxing practices (Chapter 2). Likewise the practices encompassed by the term white-collar boxing are undoubtedly more varied than indicated in this research. For instance, this research does not mean to suggest that all white-collar boxing practices mirror that discussed in this thesis, or that all forms of white-collar boxing are betrayed by its name. Though this is of course subject to further research, some white-collar programmes in the UK probably do resemble that conducted in NYC. The view from Shadcote, was that this was particularly the case in London (Chapter 6, section 6.3.3). Eyes should turn to The City in this regard. Access to elite institutions being notoriously difficult to negotiate (*e.g.* Hoffman, 1980) conducting research into city bankers boxing may be a good access point for a sociology of a power elite (Mills, 1956) that does not require access to the banks themselves.

During this research, a related practice occasionally entered my peripheral vision: white-collar mixed martial arts. This is not offered by Shadcote, but by promotions elsewhere in the UK (*e.g.* white-collar mma, 2017). The format is similar: eight weeks' training, followed by a fight. Rather than this fight being under boxing rules in a boxing ring, it is in a cage and under rules that allow kicks, elbows, grappling, and fighting on the ground, in addition

to the techniques employed in boxing. This phenomenon undoubtedly reflects the ever-growing popularity of the UFC. It may be that participants engaging in cage-fights do so in order to perform 'as if' (Seligman *et al.* 2008: 23) they are 'the Notorious' Conor McGregor or Cristiane 'Cyborg' Venâncio, superstars in the MMA world.

As discussed in Chapter 9, besides Wacquant calling them titillating whores, sociologists have paid little attention to ring girls. A purposeful sociology of ring girls is lacking. This thesis has suggested racialised and gendered standards of beauty are reproduced via the inclusion of ring girls in fight nights. However, white-collar boxing is not the best site through which to contribute to a sociology of ring girls in its own right. Ring girls are present at white-collar boxing fight nights as to reproduce the experience of a professional boxing event. Professional boxing events are a site more apt for a sociology of ring girls to be produced. A thorough sociology of ring girls in boxing would surely go some way towards a comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics of boxing, most immediately in terms of gender but also, as Chapter 9 suggests, race too.

Relatedly, a sufficient theoretical understanding of professional boxing events is lacking in the literature. Woodward (2007) has characterised professional boxing events as Bakhtinian carnival. This is inadequate (Chapter 9): carnival entails a temporary suspension of all inequality and manifestation of complete, unfettered freedom. Laughter provides the sonic backdrop to carnival, and this laughter is joyous, full of hope that the temporariness of carnival will become the established mode of the everyday. This cannot suffice as theory to which boxing scholars turn to understand professional boxing events. When boxers are in the ring, they are at the centre point of an apparatus reliant on inequality (Sugden, 1996). Moreover, two people beating each other for the entertainment of others, regardless of the structural inequalities that undergird the sport, could never be understood as operating within the spirit of complete equality. What can be retained from Woodward's theorisation is the excess and razzle-dazzle that are evident in professional boxing events, that do differentiate them from the 'normal rut of life' (Bakhtin, 1984a: 292). These are characteristics of pro boxing events, but as this thesis argued these characteristics do not a carnival make. This should provide the foundations for the further theorisation of professional boxing events – though ultimately further theorisation should be based on ethnographic research.



Seligman *et al.* (2008) discuss ritual in abstract terms. Moreover, subjunctive reality is not widely addressed in sociology. For these reasons, this thesis is a landmark in the empirical application of Seligman *et al.*'s theory. Their account provided a means through which to further understand white-collar boxing: allowing for the understanding of action sustained without mastery through ritual. Indeed, the latter chapters of this thesis can be read, in part, as a sociology of non-experts presenting as if they have expertise, novices presenting as if they are masters. This could have implications far beyond the sociology of white-collar boxing. For instance, it may allow for greater purchase on Donald Trump's presidency. The comedian-turned-journalist Frankie Boyle recently noted that Trump 'sort of looks like someone playing a president in a porno[graphic film]'. Boyle is a controversial figure, granted, though often comedians do possess a sociological imagination of sorts (Bingham and Hernandez, 2009). The pornographic element of this statement is largely irrelevant: Donald Trump is someone playing a president. He has no direct experience in politics, yet has come to occupy the most powerful seat on the global political stage. Seligman *et al.* may offer a means to further understand this scenario: what are the ritual acts that produced and continue to sustain Donald Trump's presidency? Detailed answers to this question cannot be provided here, though in brief, consider the following example: when Trump tweeted the word 'covfefe', efforts were made by his staff to maintain the subjunctive reality in which he is a political heavyweight, with Sean Spicer publicly stating that 'the President and a small group know exactly what he meant' by the word.

#### **10.4 Final Remarks**

This thesis commenced with a brief discussion of Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*. It seems appropriate to return to this here. It should be apparent now, if it was not then, why I drew upon this painting, and more specifically the text it contains: *ceci n'est pas une pipe*, or, *this is not a pipe*. It was important to make it clear, at the earliest possible stage, and in as strong as possible terms, how counter-intuitive white-collar boxing is, and accordingly the kind of discussion due to be held. This was not a thesis about boxing, as much as it was a thesis about white-collar boxing, the title of which obscures its own reality. White-collar boxing is not white-collar boxing, or rather, it is, but only if the term white-collar is understood to have

particular meaning in the context of this boxing practice, separated from and different to its wider social meaning. Whilst presented as free and for charity, it is neither free, nor straightforwardly for charity. The weigh-in is not a weigh-in. The bomber is not the bomber. This was not a thesis about boxing, but a thesis about a practice that when viewed from a 'commonsense vantage' (Harkness in Foucault, 1983: 5) paints a treacherous image. Another way of saying this is that, in various ways, 'things are not what they seem' (Berger, 1963: 34) in white-collar boxing. The term white-collar conceals the reality of the phenomenon, its social order and the divisions and structures through which it is sustained. Knowing this could only be facilitated by qualitative enquiry. We need qualitative, empirical sociological theorisation to further understand social reality. There are undoubtedly rookies elsewhere acting as if they are Rocky.

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